

OUR SEVEN CHURCHES



T. K. BEECHER

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"BEING MANY ARE ONE BODY."

OUR SEVEN CHURCHES.

THOMAS K. BEECHER,
ELMIRA, N. Y.



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TO
HORACE BUSHNELL, D. D.

Twenty-five years ago, in your discourse of *Christian Comprehensiveness*, you gave to men the truths that vitalize these Lectures. I decorate them therefore with your name, and would win readers for my words by claiming that they are kin to yours, and by gratefully professing myself: —

Your son in the Gospel, —

THOS. K. BEECHER.

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PREFATORY.

I DO not find that the people whom I serve are any less content with our own faith and order because of my repeated efforts to show them that other churches excel us in some particulars. A good man's home is the more delightful to him as he calls to mind that the world is full of good homes, and that millions are as happy as he.

Time was when "toleration" was reckoned a christian grace. Established churches tolerated (*i. e.* endured) dissenters as they would any other remediless evil or mysterious visitation. But in this land, where there is no privileged class nor established church, he who talks of *tolerating* his fellow-citizens insults them and becomes himself intolerable in his conceit. We must learn to respect and love our fellow-men and our sister churches.

Charity between churches is too often a mere sentiment, a transient thing smiling out now and

then at some union meeting or anniversary, where the speakers are equitably adjusted between the denominations, and each one is careful not to say anything in particular, and all go home delighted to find that brethren can meet and talk without offence; — all thankful that the meeting “went off well,” without a quarrel or any scandal!

Charity must strike its roots deeper than this. The sentiment needs a refreshment from facts. To respect a man increasingly we must know him more and more. To love a church we must see in it something lovable. It is impossible to love on general principles or from a sense of duty. What better service, then, can be rendered to a christian man that would love his brethren, than to set before him their lovable qualities? This service I have endeavored to render to my people, and now, by this little book, to as many others as may read.

The witness which I bear to the excellence of churches other than my own has a value in the fact, that, while they are not my own, they yet compel an admiration which I am able but in part to express.

I make no pretension to exhaustive detail in setting forth the characteristics of these churches. Possibly I may not have noticed their strongest points, their most attractive features. I have walked in them as in gardens of the Lord ; their beauties have filled my eye, and the air is fragrant round about.

All who profess and call themselves christian have surely more points of agreement than of disagreement. Every church that has maintained a separate denominational existence, by the mere fact of living proves that there is something in her that maintains her life. Every church can teach every other church something, and every church can learn. There are diversities of operations, but one Spirit, — many churches, but one religion.

I cannot see that there need be, and I certainly see that there cannot be realized among men the dream of church unity. No two men have the same horizon. Because the eye cannot reach indefinitely, therefore vision must be bounded somewhere. Because no two eyes can be in the same place at the same moment, therefore the boundaries of vision are the same to no two persons ;

that is, every man has his own horizon. Because a man cannot know all things, nor be acquainted with everybody, therefore he must be content with knowing some things and loving a few people. The things and the people that a man is able to take in, constitute his church. But let every man remember that beside his church, bounded as it must needs be by his horizon, there remain the rest of mankind and the universe of God. Let no man think of himself or of his church more highly than he ought to think, but let him think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

T. K. B.

ELMIRA, N. Y., August, 1870.

I.

ROMAN CATHOLIC.



LECTURE I.

ROMAN CATHOLIC.

IF THOU, LORD, SHOULDST MARK INIQUITIES, O LORD, WHO SHALL STAND?—*Ps.* cxxx. 3.

IN this world good and evil grow side by side. The net worth of a man is always a balance struck between his good and his evil. None is good save one, that is God. As with man, so also with churches or societies of men. Good and evil grow side by side in all churches. There is good in all, but none all good. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, what church can stand?

Oddly enough, however, good men have sometimes devoted themselves to this very work of marking the iniquity of other men, — proving and publishing the errors of other churches. Men are charitable toward the faults of their own church, but severely critical when they inspect other churches.

No church that I know of can stand up and deny all the accusations that are heaped upon her. Since they cannot be denied, they are resented. Counter

charges are hurled back. We find in literature no malediction that can equal in eloquence and force the words that christians have used in cursing christians, — so they all called themselves, but would not call each other. Religious wars have been bloodiest of all wars, — religious hate most venomous of all hate.

Some of the best people of this city suspect each other of evil, and fail to be good neighbors, because of this way we have of noting the errors of other men and of other churches, rather than their traits of excellence. Each church excels all others in something, else it would have no excuse for living.

I purpose, therefore, several lectures in which I shall take pains not to criticise, censure, or “mark iniquity”; but, contrariwise, shall declare the good, the excelling good, which I find in each of the several churches of Elmira. I will begin with the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, as being the largest in this city, and destined to become, so many think, the most influential denomination in the United States.

As protestants, many of you will express surprise, if not incredulity, in view of my undertaking. Like Nathanael, you will be asking, — Can there any good thing come out of ROME? To which I can only make Philip’s honest answer, — Come and see. For : —

1. *The name CATHOLIC is very excellent.*

The CHURCH OF ROME calls herself CATHOLIC, and no man can get this name away from her. Catholic means universal. All christians believe in the holy catholic church and the communion of saints. But the CHURCH OF ROME has somehow gained this name for herself, and every boy in the city, if he hears the word "Catholics," thinks of these ROMAN CATHOLICS.

Names are sometimes monuments. The fact that the CHURCH OF ROME has this name, and that none of us can get it away from her, is a very strong presumption that the name belongs to her historically and of right. Not in name only, but in fact also:—

2 *This CHURCH OF ROME is more nearly a universal or catholic church than any other christian denomination.*

Of all nominal christians these ROMAN CATHOLICS are most numerous. Of all religions the Buddhist is probably accepted by the largest number of human beings, but the ROMAN CATHOLIC by the greatest variety.

The ROMAN CATHOLIC doctrine and ritual is the established religion in Italy, Sicily, Spain, Portugal, Sardinia, Belgium, several small German States, one third of Switzerland, and all the vast empires France and Austria. So much for Europe,—the home of learning, art, philosophy, and civilization.

This side of the water ROME claims South America and Mexico, and a mighty army of devotees in the Canadas and the United States. In Asia and Africa even, and on the islands of the sea, the heroic missionaries of ROME have outrun all competition, and in both zeal and success surpass any other one denomination, — and I think I may say any other three denominations.

Go to Rome, and you shall find schools and colleges there for all nations and every language upon earth. Her ecclesiastics, when they meet, speak more tongues than Jerusalem heard on Pentecost. But for the CHURCH tongue, Latin, spoken nowhere else by the living, these ecclesiastics could not talk together.

The great council now sitting in Rome* illustrates the catholicity of this great CHURCH. I know of no other church or denomination that can call together a council of such dignity as to arrest the attention of all christendom, and furnish texts for repeated articles in every newspaper and periodical in the known world.

Disagree as we may and must with the CHURCH OF ROME, let us promptly admit that if any church deserve to be called catholic or universal, to the exclusion of all other churches, this ROMAN CHURCH is the one. Consequent upon her age and catholicity, I note :—

* July, 1870.

3. *The wealth of this CHURCH in its most desirable forms — architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and devotional literature — is excellent.*

In this land of meeting-houses necessitated by dissent and division, we can form little conception of those monuments of piety into which united peoples brought their contributions, as they did their prayers, daily through a lifetime, until successive generations left their testimony towering up amid their graves, that the only enduring interest and imperishable value possible to man is his piety and its achievements.

I do not forget that monarchs have commuted imperial villanies by chapels and by tombs to saints. I do not forget that ecclesiastics have subsidized the world to come to build up cathedrals, whose very name betrays their use, — mere canopies for the *cathe-dra* or bishop's chair.

But beside these monstrous abuses and extortions, there have been for centuries the steady givings of humble men and women to the treasury of the CHURCH, — givings fragrant as the two mites of the widow ; labors as pious as the service rendered by Mary to the feet of the Master. Communities undisturbed by doubt, — communities awed and quickened by the same ritual, ministered unto by the same priest, and led in beautiful consent from the cradle to the grave, — united

communities, — blossom naturally into works of pious art.

In such communities the artist, a-thrill with genius, works out his plans and pictures, and brings them to the village church as his offering to God. The sculptor finds in religious rapture inspiration which golden guineas can never give him. The poet, who is never a thinker but always a sympathizer, vibrating with the passions that fill the air, will string his lyre and sing his loftiest tune among peoples who are surging hither and thither in great tides of religious passion.

In short, the wealth of ages, slowly accumulated, remains in the possession of this ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, — ages, too, in which religion was much and economy nothing. And this accumulated wealth — architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, music, and pious literature — I note as a peculiar excellence of the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, in which regard she is not equalled by any denomination of christians, and will not, probably, ever be surpassed.

4. *The unity of ROMAN CATHOLIC doctrine and ritual throughout the world is excellent.*

When I preach for my brethren of other churches, I find cards in their pulpits telling the order of service and what is usually done at that church. I leave such a card to guide the brother who stands in my

place. And when any of you go into a strange meeting-house you feel a little embarrassed. You do not know just what to do or what comes next. Not so with a ROMAN CATHOLIC. If he go to church here on our Market street, and learn the calendar and ritual of service, he will find the same the wide world over. He may go into any parish church or proud cathedral or missionary's tent, and he will find the priest walking by the same rule and minding the same things that he learned on Market street, Elmira.

5. *The firmness and consistency with which the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH asserts her quality and authority are excellent.*

For this very excellence she is often reproached and called bigoted. Such reviling is thoughtless and ill-advised.

If any man say that Jesus Christ has founded a visible church on earth, and declared her proper order, and endowed her with sacraments and divine authority ; and, next, that the church in which he is dwelling is that one true church of Christ, — then he must of necessity deny that other churches are true churches.

Sir, I am sole agent of Rodgers' Sons for this city. They have no other agent here. But I am none of your stingy sort, and so I am willing to admit that every store

in town sells Rodgers' cutlery just as good as mine.
Nonsense !

He who in one breath says, *I belong to the one true and only church of Christ upon earth*, and in the next breath declares approval of any and all other churches as being as good as his own, stultifies himself. Pretensions such as the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH makes cannot be reconciled with liberalism and general good fellowship. The ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH is consistent in this matter. She claims to be the one true church of God, and she will not allow any other claimant to speak uncontradicted. She claims that salvation is with her ; and consistently she declares the perdition of them who are outside of her. This consistency is excellent. It is an element of strength.

In this same line of excellent consistency I note :—

6. *The fair, square way in which the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH speaks of and treats the Bible.*

The doctrine of the CATHOLIC CHURCH is that the Bible as interpreted and applied by the CHURCH and her ministers is of uttermost worth and authority. But that when used by the unlearned and unstable it becomes the text of divers and strange doctrines. Therefore let no man have or read the whole Bible except by permission of his priest or spiritual superior.

Sincere christians will be pleased to know that the

CATHOLIC CHURCH selects and prints and gives to her children all, or very nearly all, those Scriptures which have been proved precious age by age. By this I mean, that if you will prepare me a list of the instructive and comfortable words of Scripture as you have proved them after years of reading, I will show you nineteen twentieths of them all, selected and classified and given to good CATHOLICS in their prayer-books or devotional manuals. The gospels, the epistles, and the psalms which we find in the book of common prayer of the protestant episcopal church are translated bodily from similar manuals used by pious CATHOLICS. I believe it to be the custom in churches of every name to use the Scriptures eclectically and interpret them by a creed. The ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH frankly declares that they ought to be so used if at all,—a very excellent frankness. In this connection I note :—

7. *The ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH at least professes to accept and illustrate much Scripture that is usually disregarded or explained away.*

Somewhere in her vast variety of doctrine and ritual she finds place for nearly everything spoken of, or even hinted at, in Scripture. I dare not say that her illustrations are all of them sound and accurate ; but I note that the mere intention to fulfil all Scripture is at least an excellent intention.

Jesus washed the disciples' feet. A Roman bishop washes the feet of twelve beggars annually.

St. James tells us of anointing the sick with oil and praying over them. The parish priest takes his oil and goes and prays by the sick.

St. Peter tells about spirits in prison to whom Jesus went and preached. The CHURCH OF ROME tells us of purgatory and spirits still in prison that may be helped by the sacrifice of the mass and the prayers of the faithful.

St. Mark asserts that certain signs shall follow them that believe. The CHURCH OF ROME claims that there never has been a day in which miracles have not been granted somewhere in her vast domain for the comfort of the meek and childlike.

Jesus breathed on the apostles and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Roman bishops suppose themselves to confer the Holy Ghost by the same act of breathing upon candidates.

Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted, said Jesus ; whose ye retain, they are retained. This ROMAN CHURCH quietly and as a matter of course forgives sins and pronounces excommunications.

I might easily multiply citations of this sort. Of course I, a protestant, do not mean to say that the claims of the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH in all these

particulars will bear investigation. But I do say that the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH professes to give meaning and illustration to many Scriptures which are ordinarily neglected or explained away.

8. *This ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH provides excellent apparatus for the use of her children in the culture of virtue and piety.*

Alas! I cannot say that her children use the apparatus, or that her gathered multitudes are all exemplary in righteousness. The Lord himself chose twelve and taught them, and yet one of them was Judas. The fault was not of Jesus but of Judas.

The apparatus of spiritual culture in a ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH remind me vividly of our best-appointed schools. The attitude of the CHURCH and of her ministers is a parental attitude. Mother CHURCH calls, *Come, my children, listen to my words*. The children do not always come, but if they come they get help. To illustrate what I mean, let me read to you some of the questions by which a CATHOLIC is advised to examine himself previous to confession. The questions are numerous, and based on the ten commandments, one by one. I quote from those under what we call the eighth commandment:—

“THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.

“Have you been guilty of stealing, or cheating, or

“any way wronging your neighbor in buying or selling,
“or any other bargains or contracts?

“Have you been accessory to another’s committing
“any such injustice? How often? To what value?

“Have you dishonestly kept what belongs to an-
“other?

“Have you caused any damage to your neighbor in
“his house, cattle, or other goods?

“Have you contracted debts without design to
“pay them ; or without prospect of being able to pay
“them? Have you delayed or refused to pay your
“debts when you were able? Have you by prodigal
“expenses made yourself unable, and so wronged your
“creditors or your family?

“Have you been guilty of usury in the loan of
“money?

“Have you put off false money? How much? How
“often?

“Have you professed any art, or undertaken any
“business, without sufficient skill or knowledge? What
“damage has your neighbor suffered from it?

“Have you bought or received stolen goods? Or
“taken of those who could not [afford to] give?

“Have you neglected your work or business to
“which you were hired? Have you broken your
“promise in matters of consequence?

•

“Have you neglected or delayed to make restitution when it was in your power?”

Fellow-citizens! These are close questions for a man to ask himself. I have never heard any preaching half so close. And under each commandment the questions are equally searching. This is an earnest church that sets her children to look up their sins as with lighted candles, and points out every crack and corner where sins are wont to hide. Examine yourselves and confess your sins! All this is excellent.

9. *The sacrament of confession is of peculiar excellence and profit to them who piously use the same.*

That a child does well to confess his sins to a mother, no one doubts. That a husband will gain strength by confessing his sins to his wife, or at least so many of them as she can understand, no one will deny. That confession is profitable is self-evident. That men have very vague and shadowy sense of God and his presence; that men easily call themselves in a general way *miserable offenders*, and ask pardon of God without much shame or sense of sin, we all know. That our hearts are very deceitful and full of concealments and disguises, we all know. In short, we all do verily know that a hearty confession of sin made to a brother man whom we have reason to

honor, trust, and love, is a very profitable act toward reformation.

Opening the New Testament, we read : Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another. In another place we read : Whose sins soever ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. Thus, by Scripture and by consciousness, we are taught the value of confession and of declared absolution as helps toward a reformed and ennobled living. And I love the CATHOLIC CHURCH for her brave and motherly way of saying, — *Come, come, my children, and confess yourselves.*

“Let your confession be *humble*, without seeking
“excuses for your sins, or flinging the fault on others ;
“let it be *entire* as to the kind and number of your
“sins, and such circumstances as quite change the na-
“ture of the sin, or greatly increase its guilt. Be
“*modest* in your expressions, and take care not to
“name any *third* person.”

After a general and a special confession let the penitent say : —

“For these and all other my sins which I cannot
“at this time call to my remembrance, I am heartily
“sorry ; I purpose amendment for the future, and most
“humbly ask pardon of God, and penance and absolu-
“tion of you, my ghostly father.

“While the priest gives you absolution, bow down your head and with great humility call upon God for mercy ; and beg of him that he would be pleased to pronounce the sentence of absolution in heaven while his minister absolves you upon earth.”

There may possibly be vicious priests in the CATHOLIC CHURCH, — priests unworthy of trust. The perdition is theirs if they betray the Lord's little ones. One thing is very certain, — that no man ever yet confessed his sins truly, and took counsel of a christian father or adviser, but he was at once a happier and a better man for it.

10. *The ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH maintains ecclesiastical, educational, and missionary enterprises with remarkable and excellent economy.*

Her unmarried clergy and other religious men and women consecrated to church work develop a prodigious amount of labor at an incredibly small cost. To a consecrated man or woman money is no object. Having food and raiment they are therewith content. There is and can be little or no competition among them. Consequently there is no wasteful expenditure.

An accomplished scholar spending his life in a professor's chair, earns and well earns from two to three thousand dollars a year. An equal man in a ROMAN

CATHOLIC college receives, perhaps, five hundred dollars !

A skilful teacher of feminine accomplishments — as music, drawing, embroidery, French — commands in our fashionable schools from five to fifteen hundred dollars. In a ROMAN CATHOLIC school an equal ability is provided at a cost of from two hundred and fifty to three hundred dollars.

Vigorous faultfinders and censors of the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH must admit thus much at least : — That, because of the consecration of her many thousand men and women, the CHURCH is able to do a vast amount of work at comparatively small cost. And further, if self-denial and voluntary obedience and poverty are evidence of sincerity, or better, if they are graces acceptable with God, it must be at once admitted that the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH exhibits a very goodly multitude of the lowly-minded, the obedient, and the self-denying. And these are excellent. This leads naturally to —

II. *The ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, albeit no respecter of persons, can nevertheless grade and classify its members, giving to each one a position, work, and dignity according to temper and ability.*

In this city, as in all our cities, the CATHOLIC CHURCH is the church of the poor and of the hard-

working. Demagogues may have taught Irishmen to despise colored men, but no CATHOLIC priest will shut them from the church nor turn them from the altar.

Plain or even ragged and soiled apparel may be eyed and unwelcome in many churches of thrifty, well-to-do Americans, but in the CATHOLIC CHURCH dress is of no account while mass is saying.

And if any one, touched by the spirit of Christ, longs to work, the CATHOLIC CHURCH has a place for man, woman, and child. Travelers will tell you that the charities of CATHOLICS are world wide. Where cholera rages and the pestilence works desolation, you shall find brothers and sisters of mercy nursing the forsaken and shriving the dying.

When hell vomits fire and men call it war, like flowers by lava streams come quickly to the hot edges of devastation the meek and silent sisters of charity. Before the buzzards spot the sky spying their prey, these heavenly doves have found the living, comforted the dying, and are praying for the dead already buried.

Citizens of Elmira ! If we choose to inspect this CATHOLIC CHURCH, to search out and mark her errors and ransack her history for discreditable passages, we shall succeed as well as they do when they look for ours. Lo, I propose a better way. Look for the

good that belongs to her and you shall find it in great measures. Become acquainted with her best communicants, and you will find them christians of like fears and like hopes with the best in our own and in all churches. Possibly the time may never come in which they can recognize the true and the good that is with us and with others ; for which very reason others should be the happier to recognize the good that is with them.

Peace be upon them and upon the whole Israel of God. AMEN.

II.

PRESBYTERIAN.

LECTURE II.

PRESBYTERIAN.

“LIKEWISE, YE YOUNGER, SUBMIT YOURSELVES UNTO THE ELDER.” — 1 *Peter* v. 5.

THE Greek language has a word *πρέσβυς* [*presbūs*] which means old, aged, and consequently respectable, venerable. The comparative degree of this adjective is *πρεσβύτερος* [*presbūteros*], which brings us very near to our familiar word *presbyterian*, and to the subject of this lecture.

If we were accustomed to read the New Testament in Greek, we should find this word *presbyterian* or its equivalent many times repeated. Wherever you find *elders* in your Testaments, it is the Greek word *πρεσβύτερος* or an inflection of it.

Ye rulers of the people and *elders* of Israel is *presbyters* of Israel.* Or in the parable of the prodigal son,† his *elder* son was in the field, his *presbyter* son was in the field. Or, to Timothy Paul writes, entreat the *elder* women as mothers, the *presbyter* women.‡ In

* Acts iv. 8.

† Luke xv. 25.

‡ 1 Tim. v. 2.

Mark we read of the priests and scribes and *presbyters* who had sent out a crowd to arrest Jesus.* And in Matthew we read that Jesus was accused of the chief priests and *presbyters*.†

The New Testament is full of presbyterianism. It is by far the oldest and very clearly the only natural social order. YE YOUNGER, SUBMIT YOURSELVES UNTO THE ELDER.

Any society that is guided and governed by its elder members is properly called presbyterian. If it be governed by the whole congregation in mass-meeting it is congregational. If it be governed by bishops, regardless of age or number, then it is episcopal.

I note then as an excellence that belongs to the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, that : —

1. *The PRESBYTERIAN order is eminently ancient, natural, sensible, and Scriptural.*

I have no doubt that in Adam's family the younger were to submit to the elder ; and they did so until Cain killed his brother and became independent. We know surely that the congregation of Israel was organized presbyterially, and governed by a council of elders. This great original presbytery was organized by Moses at the suggestion of Jethro, his father-in-law. And this natural and wise control given to the

* Mark xiv. 43.

† Matt. xxvii. 12.

elders over the people continued in Israel down to the days of Jesus, and beyond them, affecting through the presbyterian synagogue, the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Citizens and brethren! We have used this word *presbyterian* as a proper name so long that we have forgotten its meaning. We have so long reckoned an *elder* a mere officer, that we have forgotten that *elder* means older.

But there are many passages in the New Testament in which this same slipping sense perplexes us, and we cannot say positively whether the language means an older man or an official man. Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father.* Does this protect *age* or an *officer*? Paul sent to Ephesus and called the *elders* of the church.† Does this mean *old men* of the church or *officers* of the church, which? We cannot say.

But in my lecture this evening I am to speak of something more than this etymologic and theoretic presbyterianism. We have two meeting-houses in this city, and two churches, called PRESBYTERIAN. And it is of the denomination which they represent that I am to speak the praises, because of excellencies. I have already shown, under the first head, how excellent and natural the presbyterian theory is. And now:—

Who are PRESBYTERIANS in this country? PRESBY-

* 1 Tim. v. 1.

† Acts xx. 17.

TERIANS are properly all those who regulate and control church affairs by elders, — ruling elders and teaching elders, who are ordained and organized into judicatories, rising higher and higher in dignity and authority, and including larger and larger territory under their jurisdiction. The usual names for these judicatories are : *session* for a church ; *presbytery* for three or more churches in a district ; *synod* for three or more presbyteries ; and *general assembly* of commissioners from every presbytery in the land.

But in addition to this simple and excellent church order, PRESBYTERIANS hold fast a confession of faith and two catechisms, usually called the Westminster confession or symbols. These standards are the production of a great company of English ministers and laymen, with four or five delegates from Scotland. They were called together by the famous long parliament in 1543. And they did much work ; they came very near making the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH the established church of England.

In this famous assembly PRESBYTERIANS and congregationists sat and voted side by side. And when in after years both denominations were humbled by persecution, their ministers came together in London, and both parties gave up their old names and took for their common denominator “UNITED BRETHREN.”

In this country it has always been difficult to keep the fences in good repair between the congregationists and PRESBYTERIANS. In New England, the two words used to mean the same thing. But of late more attention has been given to fence-building, with painful success. The name UNITED BRETHREN is no longer needed.

Having given you thus a very meagre sketch of PRESBYTERIAN polity and the origin of its doctrine, I can now speak of a second excellence of PRESBYTERIANISM.

2. *The creed and catechism of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH as put into the hands of its members is more broadly based on holy Scripture, and more copiously illustrated by citations of the text, than any other symbol of doctrine that I have ever met.*

This is as it should be. For "the supreme Judge," say these PRESBYTERIANS, "by whom all controversies "of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of "councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of "men, and private spirits are to be examined ; and in "whose sentence we are to rest ; can be no other but "the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." It is well, therefore, that the creed and catechisms of a church that puts so high an estimate on Scripture should be grounded and built upon many and strong quotations.

A careful student of what is pleasantly called the little Blue-book of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH will find that the marginal notes, which are all of them quoted from the Bible, serve admirably as a concordance, by help of which almost any Scripture that relates to personal piety or systematic theology may be readily found. And although, in one or two minor particulars, I cannot accept the doctrine of these creeds or teach them, (nor in all my life have I ever seen a man that did accept or teach ALL the articles of these creeds,) yet they are, for substance of doctrine, a most excellent digest of Scripture. And no person that would merit the name of an intelligent christian disciple can afford to dispense with this manual of instruction, based as it is upon the Word of God.

Its very faults grow out of his excellencies. Its garblings and misapplis of Scripture are the result of the unusual familiarity of the fathers with the words of the received version, and the habit they had in common with pious Israelites of thinking and talking in Scripture phrases.

It is to be feared that many families belonging to the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH are not aware of the excellencies of this little book of sound doctrine. It is to be feared that there are many PRESBYTERIAN families that do not own it, and others who have never so much

as seen it or heard it read. Very few christians make use of the privileges which are peculiarly their own. Nearly all of our churches are more prompt to resent an assault made upon their precious things, than they are to make good use of them in daily discipline, and illustrate their excellence in daily conversation.

But however neglected and unknown these Westminster symbols may be among the people called PRESBYTERIAN, they are nevertheless peculiarly excellent in being broadly based on holy Scripture, and copiously illustrated by citations of the text.

3. PRESBYTERIAN *order is the true and original type of protestant organization.*

The churches at the Reformation fell naturally into PRESBYTERIAN order; and at this day, whenever protestants undertake any organization at all, they tend toward PRESBYTERIANISM. It is very difficult to keep from slipping into it. I do not say PRESBYTERIAN doctrine, but PRESBYTERIAN order.

Thus a methodist rejoices in an official board, or session; a quarterly conference, preachers' meeting or presbytery; an annual conference or synod; a general conference or general assembly. As soon as lay members are admitted to these bodies, there will be no substantial difference between the methodist order and the PRESBYTERIAN.

Congregationists have a church committee for session ; association for presbytery ; general association for synod ; general council for general assembly. And whenever congregational ministers get together, they usually have one of their number on guard as a censor, to keep the brethren from talking PRESBYTERIAN words and acting PRESBYTERIAN acts. As Darwin would say, all protestant varieties show a tendency to revert to the PRESBYTERIAN original. We all take to it naturally.

4. *The PRESBYTERIAN is, in my judgment, the church order which can be most easily illustrated and justified by the New Testament.*

I do not mean that all the four grades of judicatory now known as PRESBYTERIAN can be found in the New Testament, grade for grade ; but only that the elements of this system are apparent and more easily found, than the elements of any other system. There is difficulty in explaining and harmonizing all that the New Testament teaches us as to apostolic usage and early church order ; all of us are tempted to stretch some Scriptures and shrink others in order to justify our own usages. But in my judgment the PRESBYTERIAN has need to stretch and shrink and explain his proof-texts far less frequently than any other denominational christian that I know of. The Roman catholic who tries to prove his hierarchy at one extreme, and the

quaker and independent who try to prove personal sufficiency at the other extreme, have hard work of it, both of them. But the PRESBYTERIAN sails through the New Testament with the wind free and every sail drawing, — his navigation is easy. This suggests, Scripture aside :—

5. PRESBYTERIANISM *is a happy mean between spiritual despotism and spiritual lawlessness.*

We have a session, using all the authority that should ever be exercised by a christian church over its members, — a session of ruling elders. At the same time this session, having been elected by the people, can with great difficulty be induced to become lords over God's heritage. Meanwhile, lest the session level downward, and wallow in error and democratic license, several churches are associated, and the acts of session are reviewed and criticised by presbytery.

To avoid falling into localisms and provincialisms, we have synod and assembly, and with them all that shadowy sublimity which so satisfies feeble minds, that need to feel that they are not mere church-goers in a little meeting-house, depending upon God, but members also of the great PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. Thus in PRESBYTERIANISM we have a happy mean between despotism and anarchy, — an ecclesiastical republic. This fact suggests :—

6. PRESBYTERIANISM *is in striking agreement with the political order of these United States.*

All our laws are enacted in the name of the people by elected representatives of the people. The people do not pretend to govern themselves. We are content with a representative system. If, as many suppose, it be at all desirable that the institutions of the church and of the state should be in harmony, then, beyond all question, PRESBYTERIAN or representative government is the church order most nearly in accord with our state and national usage.

But you will ask me : What special *religious* quality or excellence marks the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH? What particular truth does she emphasize? I cannot tell you. Protestant churches are so nearly identical in their religious doctrine that no fair-minded man can choose between them. They are so much alike that a teachable stranger has need to inquire, at close of service, with what church he has been worshiping.

If urgently pressed to name some characteristic of the denomination, some quality emphasized by it more incessantly than by any other, I might venture to say : —

7. *The PRESBYTERIANS are inclined to give unusual emphasis to law, and conscience, and duty.*

The people as a whole are more sober, and on Sun-

days more solemn, than the people of some sister denominations. The Roman catholic finds mystery and awe in religion. The PRESBYTERIAN finds duty and law. The catholic makes much of salvation by Christ. The PRESBYTERIAN makes much of pardon and justification by Christ.

On the whole we may say that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH is the church of sobriety, solemnity, and decorum. Not that other churches are destitute of these qualities, but that this CHURCH illustrates them conspicuously.

But let it not be supposed that this CHURCH is a narrow or bigoted church. Like all other churches she is afflicted here and there by little, narrow men, who misrepresent the genius and doctrine of the CHURCH; and the MOTHER suffers because of her blundering sons. I therefore gladly note, as an excellence of the PRESBYTERIANS : —

8. *Their comprehensive and elastic acceptance of other christians as members with them of the church of Christ.*

But one denomination that I know of can equal the PRESBYTERIAN in preparation for christian union at any moment.

The PRESBYTERIAN declares that “God alone is “Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the “teachings and commandments of men which are in

“anything contrary to his Word. Therefore, they consider the rights of private judgment in all matters that respect religion as universal and inalienable.”

They also believe that there “are truths and forms with respect to which men of good character and principles may differ. And in all these, they think it the duty of private christians and of societies to exercise mutual forbearance.”

Listen to the invitation which a PRESBYTERIAN gives to the sacrament :—

“He (the minister) shall invite to the Lord’s table such as, being sensible of their lost and helpless state by sin, depend upon the atonement of Christ for pardon and acceptance with God ; such as, being instructed in the gospel-doctrine, have a competent knowledge to discern the Lord’s body ; and such as desire to renounce their sins and are determined to lead a holy and Godly life.”

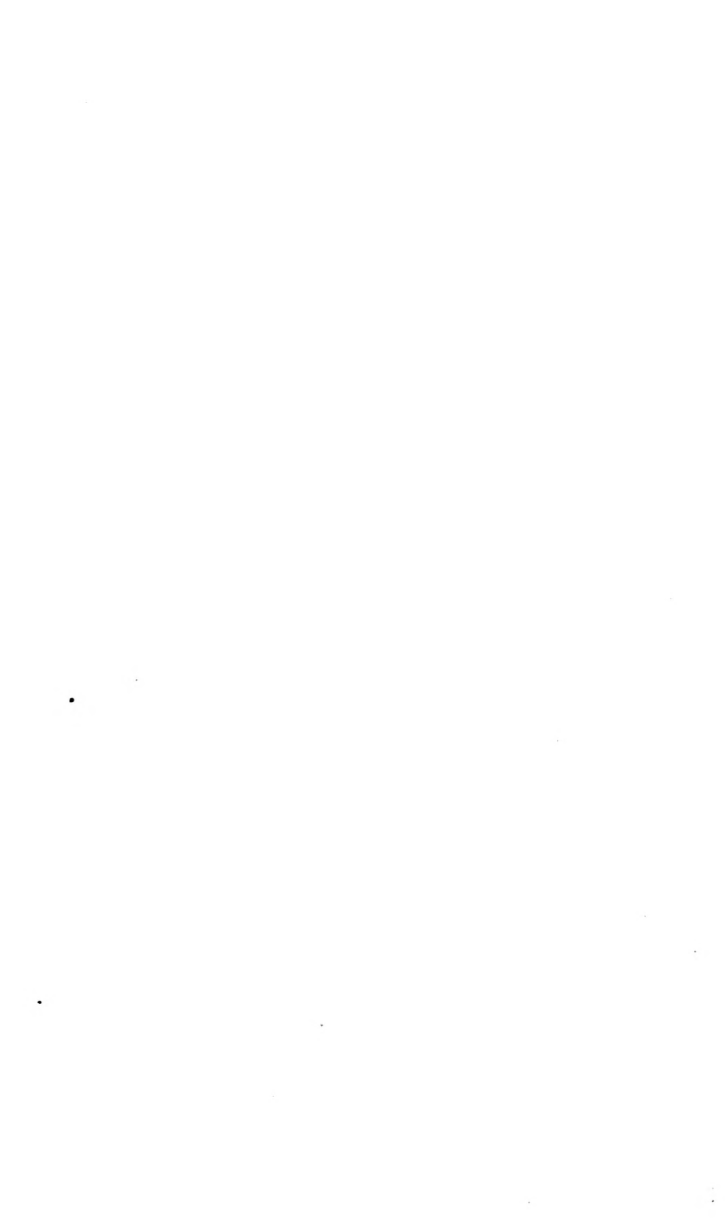
Some of you may be comforted to know how large the welcome given by a true PRESBYTERIAN to his children in the bosom of the CHURCH. He agrees with the episcopal, the Roman catholic, and the Lutheran in his love of children. See :—

“Children born within the pale of the CHURCH and dedicated to God in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the CHURCH ; and are

“to be taught to read and repeat the catechism, the
“apostles’ creed, and the Lord’s prayer. They are to
“be taught to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God, and to
“obey the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they come
“to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal,
“appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient
“knowledge to discern the Lord’s body, they ought to
“be informed that it is their duty and their privilege
“to come to the Lord’s supper.”

Citizens of Elmira! The oldest church and the largest meeting-house in this city are called PRESBYTERIAN. By right of seniority, to this *old first church* belongs the title, THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN ELMIRA. In essentials, all true christians are in accord with her. In non-essentials, all PRESBYTERIANS worthy of their honored name set us a grand example of comprehensiveness and charity.

Peace be upon them, and upon all that anywhere call upon our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.



III.

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL.

LECTURE III.

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL.

“LET ANOTHER MAN PRAISE THEE, AND NOT THINE OWN MOUTH; A STRANGER, AND NOT THINE OWN LIPS.” — *Prov.* xxvii. 2.

IF any man, however deserving, begin to show off and brag, speaking often of his past record and public services, he makes himself offensive. But when a general gives credit to his brother generals, and ascribes victory to their wisdom and to the valor of the army, then all are pleased. Such words are twice useful,—they profit him who speaks and them of whom they are spoken.

In something the same way we are offended when we hear or read the words which churchmen speak in praise each of his own church or denomination. They seem conceited, arrogant, offensive. They promote vain-glory at home and ill-will abroad.

But it has seemed to me that christian pastors and prelates might at least be as courteous one to another as army officers are! And if we would silence our

own boastfulness, and note and praise the beauty of our sister churches more, there might come to pass among christian people a smiling charity and peaceful rejoicing.

I invite you, therefore, this evening, to view the beauty, the uses, and the truth that belong to those christians among us who are popularly called

EPISCOPALIANS.

In this city there are four kinds of church that have bishops, and therefore may call themselves episcopal : viz. Roman episcopal, PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL, methodist episcopal, and American methodist episcopal Zion.

Only one of these is generally known as the EPISCOPAL CHURCH, viz. the PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL, represented in this city by two parishes and a mission.

This EPISCOPAL CHURCH in America is in fact a continuation of the church of England. As gardeners lay down a branch of a vine and stake it fast and cover it till it takes root, and then cut it off and leave it to grow by its own roots ; so the EPISCOPAL CHURCH in this land was a branch of the church of England, which was laid down and rooted ; and by the war of

the Revolution was cut off, to grow ever since with roots of its own.

The CHURCH in America differs from the church of England in those matters chiefly that must needs have been changed because these states ceased to be colonies and became a federal nation with a new and differing political constitution. Instead of king, the CHURCHMAN in America says president; for parliament, congress. He needs a prayer quite new for his legislature and governor, for in England there are none such. But he drops all mention of the gunpowder plot, the martyrdom of Charles I., the accession and happy reign of our sovereign lady, queen Victoria; and all other strictly English events.

The American CHURCHMAN omits, too, the Athanasian creed, so called, which is long and true, but has a dry and funny rattle to it that makes irreverent people smile.

Of all the protestant churches, the EPISCOPAL best deserves the name *reformed*. She preserves so many of the usages and excellences of the Roman church, and so few of her errors, that is easy to see that she is a reformed church. Other protestant churches seem revolutionary rather than reformed.

“The Reformation” was, in England, more than two hundred years long. There were no volcanic con-

vulsions : no one brilliant fourth-of-July day in which the great reform was proclaimed. Nor was the reformation purely and disinterestedly religious.

When the pope (Urban V., 1365) demanded large sums of money in payment of tribute long in arrear, parliament gave willing ear to the reformer, Wickliffe, who denied the authority of Rome, and so excused the nation from paying its debt. Afterward (1380) this same great man finished a translation of the Latin Bible into English. He wrote tracts for the people. He revived preaching to the people. His disciples went diligently up and down the land, teaching and preaching the truth and the authority of holy Scripture.

Thus, one hundred and fifty years before Luther was heard of as a revolutionary reformer (1518), the leaven of Bible reading and private thinking was at work among the English people.

But the church of England was still Roman catholic, notwithstanding the work that was going on among the people. The followers of Wickliffe, known in history as Lollards, furnished thousands of names to the bishops' lists of heretics, elsewhere known as the noble army of martyrs.

During the reign of Henry VIII. (1534), the church in England was declared independent of Rome. This

was perhaps the crisis of the English reformation. King Henry was a man not unlike famous king David, in his love of woman, his domestic troubles, his tempestuous piety, and intermittent conscientiousness. He was a many-sided, large-patterned man ; a riddle to all small-eyed writers of history.

This singular king, having married his brother's widow by special permission of the church of Rome, by and by applied to that same church to declare the marriage unlawful ; and when the bishop of Rome would not grant this required divorce, Henry, the headstrong and hearty, declared it himself, married again, laughed at his own excommunication, caused himself to be proclaimed supreme head of the church of England, and to prove that in these steps he was quite right, he cut off any man's head who should dispute or deny the same :—*e. g.* Sir Thomas More (1534).

Here then we come to a church independent of Rome, but not yet reformed. The Bible was in many churches, yet men not a few were slain for reading it and talking it. Among these, William Tyndale deserves mention ; for he translated the New Testament into felicitous English, and published much wise doctrine, in consequence of which he was duly strangled and burned.

The king multiplied Bibles, but cut off Bible readers.

After Henry and his stormy ways came pious and gentle Edward VI. to the throne, and at once the flower of reform began to blossom, and the church to show the features which she wears to-day.

The English Bible was read as now by lessons at morning and evening service. The general liturgy was translated and said in English. The creed of the Church was packed in forty-two articles, afterwards reduced to the famous thirty-nine. Accordantly, both the bread and the wine were given to the common people at the sacrament, and other reforms and purifyings were set afoot.

Edward's reign was a short one (1547-53), long enough to introduce these changes, yet short enough to prevent the protestants from getting too much headway.

After him came the pious and conscientious but gloomy and unhappy queen Mary, who strove to bring the realm of England back to Rome. She caused persuasive fires to be kindled for the good of dissenting souls. She did what she could, but she could not undo the reformation. Parliament and the people were too much for her. But her opposition kept the reformers from running into extravagance and cruelty.

After Mary came Elizabeth, who caused Roman catholics at one extreme and puritans at the other to feel her scorn, and suffer fines, imprisonment, and death.

Then came James I. of England, by whose order our present Bible was prepared and printed and authorized.

Thus from reign to reign the church of England has come down, acquiring little by little her present shape, and laying off the corruption and unreason of the Roman church, as formerly existing and administered in a rude age.

The prayer-book may be called substantially complete as we now have it, in the middle of the seventeenth century (1661). Thus this church of England spent nearly three hundred years on her work of purifying and simplifying. And of all protestant churches therefore she best deserves the name *reformed*.

In this country, the first parish of this CHURCH was probably that in Jamestown, Virginia (1606 or 1608). Down to the war of the Revolution the CHURCH in this land was under the care of the bishops of London.

Shortly after the Revolution an application was made to parliament to allow an American bishop to be consecrated. But the puritans and presbyterians op-

posed the proposition, and so Mr. Seabury, the candidate, had to put up with a second-rate consecration at the hands of certain Scotch bishops. But at last (1787) parliament allowed the archbishop of Canterbury to consecrate three regular, first-class bishops for New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia respectively. Since then the holy unction has not been allowed to fail. With pious care it has been propagated. And the EPISCOPAL CHURCH in these United States stands to-day as truly and regularly in the line of apostolic succession as the church of England herself.

After this mere outline of her history it remains that I note some of her excellent uses and beauties.

1. *The EPISCOPAL CHURCH offers for our use the most venerable liturgy in the English tongue.*

The devotional treasures of the Roman catholic church are locked up. Her matchless literature is embalmed and buried in Latin. But in English there are no lessons, gospels, psalms, collects, confessions, thanksgivings, prayers, — in one word, no religious FORM-BOOK, — that can stand a moment in comparison with the prayer-book of the EPISCOPAL CHURCH in the twofold quality of richness and age.

The proper name, because truly descriptive, for this CHURCH, would be CHURCH OF THE PRAYER-BOOK.

As is the way with all other churches, so here, the CHURCH champions and leaders have many wise things to say about the CHURCH and her prerogative. But the pious multitude that frequent her courts are drawn thither mostly by love of the prayers and praises, the litanies and lessons of the prayer-book.

And, brethren of every name, I certify you that you rarely hear in any church a prayer spoken in English, that is not indebted to this prayer-book for some of its choicest phrases.

And further : I doubt that life has in store for any of you an uplift so high or downfall so deep but that you can find company for your soul and fitting words for your lips among the treasures of this book of common prayer.

In all time of our tribulation ; in all time of our prosperity ; in the hour of death and in the day of judgment : Good Lord deliver us.

As a consequence of the prayer-book and its use, I note :—

2. *The EPISCOPAL CHURCH preserves a high grade of dignity, decency, propriety, and permanence in her public offices.*

In nearly every newspaper you may read some funny story based upon the ignorance, or the eccentricity, or blasphemous familiarity of some extempo-

rizing prayer-maker. All of you here present have been at some time shocked or bored by public devotional performances. Nothing of this sort ever occurs in the EPISCOPAL CHURCH. All things are done decently and in order.

And so too of permanence and its accumulating worth of holy association; no transient observer can adequately value this treasure of a birthright CHURCH-MAN.

To be using to-day the self-same words that have through the centuries declared the faith or made known the prayer of that mighty multitude who, being now delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity:—

To be baptized in early infancy, and never to have known a time when we were not recognized and welcomed among the millions who have entered the CHURCH by the same door:—

To be, in due time, confirmed in a faith that has sustained a noble army of confessors, approving its worth through persecutions and prosperities, a strength to the tried and a chastening to the worldly-minded:—

To be married by an authority before which kings and peasants bow alike, asking benediction upon the covenant that, without respect of persons, binds by the same words of duty the highest and the lowest:—

To bring our new-born children as we were brought, to begin where we began and to grow up to fill our places :—

To die in the faith and almost hear the gospel words soon to be spoken over our own graves, as over the thousand times ten thousand of them who are asleep in Jesus :—

In short, to be a devout and consistent CHURCH-MAN, brings a man through aisles fragrant with holy association, and accompanied by a long procession of the good, chanting as they go a unison of piety and hope, until they come to the holy place where shining saints shall sing the new song of the redeemed. And these sing with them.

Another excellence I note :—

3. *The EPISCOPAL CHURCH furnishes to all who need such comfort, the assurance of an organic and unbroken unity and succession from Jesus Christ, through the apostles, by a line of authentic bishops, down to bishop Huntington of this diocese.*

King Henry VIII. and queen Elizabeth, with their proclamations and parliaments, are so conspicuous, and fill so much space in the merely political history of the English church, that many able writers deny that the river of apostolic succession, so dammed by them, could ever get around the dam and flow along

again pure and uncontaminated. I cannot decide this question absolutely. What I say is this : —

The apostolic succession in the EPISCOPAL CHURCH can be traced back so many hundred years into the dim past, that it is no shame to any common man to say, *I believe it to extend back to Peter, Paul, and John*; and he who verily believes that the ordaining or confirming hand of the bishop of his diocese is electric with the spiritual life that proceeds from Jesus of Galilee, will find it a hand of virtue and worth. He who doubts will find it a hand of form and ceremony.

And so without stopping to decide the question whether our bishop is really a successor of Paul or John, I say that the EPISCOPAL CHURCH affords so much evidence that she has in her episcopate the true succession, that it is no shame to a common man to believe her. And if he BELIEVES in his bishop he will get from him all the benefit that can come from bishops.

Brethren, many needy souls are not able to lay hold upon God one by one. They cannot appropriate a gospel promise to themselves. Like Job of old, they say, *If I had called and he had answered me, yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice.*

Such extreme and exemplary humility asks for and

needs a church ark and the humble place and privilege of a private passenger — the ark of God that shall outride the deluge. The church of Christ in which is found salvation.

I say, then, that the claims of this EPISCOPAL CHURCH to be such an ark of God, or church of Christ, endowed with sacraments, absolutions, and profitable authority, are for all practical uses valid.

I leave historians and ecclesiastics to their endless words, and assert that the poor in spirit who seek comfort and salvation through the offices of the EPISCOPAL CHURCH are as well off in her as they can be in any church. And since many are profoundly prejudiced against the church of Rome, I am happy to point all such to a sure welcome in the EPISCOPAL CHURCH, with sacraments, successions, and authority as good as the best.

4. *The EPISCOPAL CHURCH is excellent in her provisions for christian education and pious drill.*

Churches that avowedly receive infants as members must necessarily provide education for them. Accordingly, the EPISCOPAL CHURCH is characteristically a church for the training of children, just as some sister churches are characteristically *revival churches* for the conversion of grown folk.

In the prayer-book and the CHURCH almanac you

find the christian year divided into periods separated by high days, — monuments and memorials of christian story. This christian calendar agrees very nearly with that of the Roman church. He is an unusually well-informed christian who can read over this catalogue of days, and in few words tell the story that each day celebrates. But a birthright CHURCHMAN who has been quietly trained in his CHURCH home for fifteen years will need very little teaching more.

In connection with this calendar is a system of lessons, in following which the reader is led through the entire Bible each year, and through its more profitable parts monthly or oftener.

He who for years has been a CHURCHMAN, and yet remains ill-grounded in Scripture, shows himself an unworthy son of a very faithful mother.

By the lessons, gospels, epistles, psalms, and collects appointed for special fast or feast days, the events commemorated by the day are wrought into the memory of every worshiper ; and by seasons longer or shorter of special religious effort and observance, this CHURCH satisfies the same want which other churches satisfy by weeks of prayer, protracted meetings, and revivals.

A good school is a dull place to any visitor who rushes in to find sensation and excitement. He will

call it dry, poky, stupid. In like manner, many religious sensation makers and sensation seekers will promptly vote the CHURCH calendar and all her smooth machinery of pious drill a very dull substitute for a regular, rousing revival. But, in the long run, the church that steadily trains and teaches will outlive the church that only arouses and startles. If ye *continue* in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.

5. *This CHURCH makes a distinction between her creed as a church, to which all her officers must subscribe, and that much shorter declaration of faith which she expects from her children.*

This CHURCH never vexes converts with profound questions in theology. Of those who would receive the Lord's supper she requires "that they repent
"them truly of their former sins, steadfastly purpos-
"ing to lead a new life ; that they have a lively faith
"in God's mercy through Christ, and a thankful re-
"membrance of his death, and that they be in charity
"with all men."

To any and to all such, asking no further questions, this catholic and most generous CHURCH approaches, and by the hand of her priest gives the consecrated bread with benediction :—" *The body of
"our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, pre-
"serve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take*

*“and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee;
“feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving.”*
And with like words the consecrated wine : *“Drink
“this in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for
“thee, — and be thankful.”*

Citizens and christians all ! — Because this EPISCOPAL CHURCH is a reformed church, and not revolutionary ; — because her book of prayer is rich and venerable above all in the English tongue ; — because her ritual promotes decency, dignity, propriety, and permanence ; — because her historic union through the apostles with Christ comforts and satisfies so many souls ; — because she adopts her infant children and provides for them education and drill ; — and because with large hospitality she proffers her sacrament to all true believers of every name : — Therefore from her own psalter let us take the words wherewith to bless her.

“They shall prosper that love thee. Peace be
“within thy walls, and plenteousness within thy pal-
“aces. For thy brethren and companions’ sakes I
“will wish thee prosperity. Yea, because of the house
“of the Lord our God I will seek to do thee good.”

PRAYER.

*“ O God, the creator and preserver of all mankind, we
“ humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men ;
“ that thou wouldst be pleased to make thy ways known
“ unto them, thy saving health unto all nations. More
“ especially we pray for thy Holy Church universal ; that
“ it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that
“ all who profess and call themselves christians may be
“ led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of
“ spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.”*

AMEN.

IV.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL.

3*

LECTURE IV.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL.

LOOK NOT EVERY MAN ON HIS OWN THINGS, BUT EVERY MAN ALSO ON THE THINGS OF OTHERS. — *Phil.* ii. 4.

SELF-LOVE and self-service are natural. Self-protection is nature's first law. A generous appreciation of other people and of strangers is not natural. It is an acquired grace. As with the individual so with churches. To know and love and be at rest in one's own church is natural. With generous comprehension to know and admire all sister churches is an acquired grace.

It seems a pity that good men must needs die and go to heaven in order to find each other out! It is a pity that churches and the clergy can promptly tell the errors that deface sister churches, but with less of eloquence declare the graces that beautify them.

Which shall we look at, the rose-buds or the rose-bugs, when we visit a neighbor's conservatory? Leave the bugs to the gardener, and let us enjoy the buds and blossoms. I speak to you, at this time, of the

roses that bud and blossom in the METHODIST garden.

The denomination which we call METHODIST EPISCOPAL is known in Great Britain and her colonies as WESLEYAN METHODIST. The beginnings of this great CHURCH were simultaneous in England and America. Revivals, of unprecedented and amazing power, followed the preaching and praying of Wesley and Whitefield, and of other men who were moved to the work by their example. In this country the fruit of these revivals was readily harvested by churches already existing, and no distinctively METHODIST organization seemed called for. The METHODIST revivals began in both lands. The METHODIST organization and system began in Great Britain. Thither, then, let us look and gather up a little history of them.

In 1729 there were four young men at Oxford university, England, who became intensely anxious to do the right thing and please God. They studied, they prayed, they fasted, they examined themselves. They went gospeling to the prisons among felons and thieves, and teaching among the children of the poor. The more famous members of this "Holy club" were John and Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield. But perhaps the most useful member of all was one Morgan, by whose sweet temper and good sense the company

were exercised in works of charity, instead of growing fat and foolish with pious dreams, or crazy with ascetic ecstasies. So Jesus in his day set his holy apostolic club at work as well as at prayer.

A small lamp shines far in the dark, and all England was dark enough when Whitefield began to preach.

Sometimes because the rectors of parishes would not open the church doors, but oftener because the meeting-houses were too small for the crowds, Whitefield preached in the open air. Reluctantly John Wesley found himself drawn into the same novel, if not disorderly, practice.

Astounding conversions multiplied ; and, as in the days of Jesus and the apostles, it seemed as if the lowest and worst people were the ones most moved by this new and great power of God.

The orderly, and, *at that time*, sleepy church of England, could not understand this new blaze of enthusiasm. Pentecostal revivals scared them as much as they would us. And although Wesley and his preachers revered the church and counseled all converts to go to the church for confirmation and the sacraments, yet the converts would not go ; or, going, were not at home or comforted. Separate organization was forced upon these earnest men.

In London, for instance, eight or ten persons came

to John Wesley and desired that he would spend some time among them, and "advise them how to flee from the wrath to come." Here began a "United society," for no one dreamed of a new or dissenting church. They met in "the Foundry," an old, deserted government building.

This was the first purely METHODIST organization, free from all Moravian and from all Calvinistic admixture. In 1839, therefore, the METHODISTS throughout the world joined to celebrate their centenary, unanimously agreeing to reckon from the year 1739, when these "United brethren" did unwittingly found a church, although they only meant to have good meetings and help one another to escape from the wrath to come.

Similar societies sprung up all over Great Britain, and naturally looked for guidance to the preachers by whose words they had been quickened; these preachers in turn looked to Wesley and to the London society; and so, as they came together once a year or oftener to confer and compare experiences and results, their meetings became conferences; and the minutes of these meetings were and are the constitution of METHODISM. The discipline in use to-day is but a digest of the results and conclusions of these earnest conferences, presided over by John Wesley. The first of these conferences was held in London in 1744.

But before this the need of the "societies" had been so great that John and Charles Wesley, without other help from man, prepared "General rules of the United societies." These rules seem to me a better basis for church organization than those creeds to which our ears have become wonted. Note an extract or two. They define a "United society," or, as we call it, a METHODIST CHURCH, as :—

"A company of men having the form and seeking "the power of Godliness ; united in order to pray together, and to watch over one another in love, that "they may help each other to work out their salvation."

But one condition of membership was stipulated :—
"A desire to flee from the wrath to come and be "saved from their sins."

"This desire must be shown by doing no harm, and "by doing good. Avoid profane swearing, Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, buying or selling liquors or "drinking them, except in cases of extreme necessity. "Avoid fighting, quarreling, brawling, going to law, re- "turning evil for evil or railing for railing. Avoid using "many words in buying or selling, speaking evil of "magistrates or ministers. Avoid gold ornaments and "costly apparel. Avoid borrowing without a probability of paying, or running up shop accounts when one "cannot pay."

The good to be done is of kinds as follow :—

“ Doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as
“ possible, to all men ; to their bodies, by giving food
“ to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting and
“ helping the sick and the prisoners ; to their souls, by
“ instructing, reproving, exhorting all they have any in-
“ tercourse with. By attending on all the ordinances
“ of God, such as public worship, ministry of the Word,
“ the Lord’s supper, family and private prayer, search-
“ ing the Scriptures, and fasting.” These are some
of the common sense and pious requirements of the
METHODISTS. Gainsay them who can !

The heroic endurance and achievements of these
christian preachers and people are almost incredi-
ble. Abate three or four miracles—as the lame
man healed by Peter and John, the death of Ana-
nias and Sapphira, the deliverances from prison of
Peter, Paul and Silas—abate these, and St. Luke
records in all the Acts no daring more heroic, no de-
votion more absolute, and no victories more bril-
liant, than may be read in the annals of these early
METHODISTS. Of these evangelic preachers we may
say, as was said long ago of other men of faith :—
They “ had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings
“ [and duckings] ; yea, moreover, of bonds [fines] and
“ imprisonments. They were stoned, they were

“tempted, were destitute, afflicted, tormented ;
“of whom the world was not worthy.”

All this within the last hundred years ! Men are probably now living who have seen and talked with John Wesley. And, which is very noteworthy, Wesley and his preachers were not noisy destructives nor revolutionists. To the day of his dying, John Wesley was set against any splitting off from the church of England. He himself was a priest of that church. He reckoned his great work to be a quickening, a revival, in the old church. Like Jesus he aimed not to destroy but to fill full. Whatever appearance of schism marked the METHODIST movement during Wesley's lifetime was necessitated by the intolerance of churchmen and by the outcry of his multiplying societies, famine-stricken for the sacraments. Fifty years after the founding of his London society, when he could reckon preachers by hundreds and METHODISTS by thousands (293 and 71,000), Wesley still counsels adherence to the church of England. “I declare once
“more that I live and die a member of the church of
“England, and that none who regard my judgment or
“advice will ever separate from it.”

In England to-day many METHODIST societies use a liturgy selected from the prayer-book and arranged by John Wesley. Many METHODISTS, having pious love

for the church of England, send their children to the bishops of that church for confirmation. Intelligent METHODISTS of Great Britain even now prefer to call their churches "societies," and their meeting-houses "chapels," and their bishops "superintendents."

But in this country the METHODISTS stand up and thrive with something more of stiffness, strength, and spread. They are not a vine, but a tree.

The METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH in America, like the Wesleyan societies in Great Britain, began with little meetings of right earnest men and women anxious to be saved from the wrath to come. John Wesley, and yet more extensively George Whitefield, had preached in nearly all of what we now call the Atlantic states from Georgia to Maine. But they gathered no churches.

In 1766 some Irish emigrants in New York city were stirred up to repent and return from their backslidings by the urgency of one old woman, who bade Mr. Embury "preach to us or we shall all go to hell together." He preached. A society was gathered, and in 1768 Wesley chapel was built on John street, New York, and Mr. Embury preached in it in October. Preachers came over from England and others sprung up at home ; and though the heat of war passion drove most of the English preachers back again during the

Revolution, and many METHODISTS suffered in person and property, yet at the close of the war there remained forty-three preachers and nearly fourteen thousand members in this land.

To aid these far away brethren and guard them against crude and scandalous irregularities, John Wesley, priest, appointed Thomas Coke, also a priest, to be a superintendent or bishop of the METHODISTS in America.

He in turn ordained Francis Asbury ; and the American preachers, in general conference in Baltimore, acknowledged these two as their "bishops." Ever since then, the METHODIST bishops in this land are successors of Coke and Asbury ; they in their time received ordination from one John Wesley, who was not a bishop at all according to men, but was nevertheless called of God to govern a larger diocese than he of Canterbury ever knew — the METHODIST CHURCH at large.

Thus much I offer as outline history from 1729, when the "Holy club" began to pray at Oxford, down to 1839, when METHODISTS filled their first denominational century.

And now, as our text says, let us "look upon the things" of these METHODISTS and admire them. True, they have been changing many things during the last

thirty years. The features which I am about to describe are not so clearly seen to-day as formerly. The METHODIST CHURCH is in transition. I cannot cast her horoscope. But looking back, I note :—

1. *The METHODIST is pre-eminently the revival church. Other denominations that have had success in revivals resemble the METHODIST in proportion to their success.*

METHODISM was, as we have seen, a quickening in the church of England. A few men began to make it their chief aim in life to please God and attain unto an assured sense of acceptance with him. They ceased from ceremony and sacrament. They silenced the public voice of theology and metaphysics. They went out and told men :— *You are wicked men. You are going to hell. You deserve to go. But oh ! how God has loved you ! How he hates to damn you ! Repent ! Repent and believe on the only Saviour, Jesus the Christ of God ! Flee from the wrath to come ! Repent, believe, pray, declare your faith and behave yourselves !*

The theology of the METHODIST is thus a working theology. There is something that man can do and he would better be up and doing. God has intrusted man with a power to be saved, or to save himself ; never mind which you call it, so long as you are saved.

A truly METHODIST CHURCH or society is to-day what it was at the first, a company of men anxious to flee the wrath to come and help each other on toward the full assurance of sin pardoned and of God reconciled. Starting with this single aim, all else that is at all peculiar in METHODISM has grown up, and justifies itself, not by appeals to Scripture or to tradition or to venerable usage; but by strong hearty christian common sense and utility. Thus, for instance, we have :—

2. *The METHODIST doctrine and usage as to backsliders.*

When Paul the apostle was the revivalist there were some Galatians who ran well for a time only. Nor he nor any other man can tell who will run well the christian race, except by starting them, cheering them, and watching the result. Plant one hundred trees and ten are to die. “Which ten?” Plant and see. If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed, said Jesus. The only practical test of piety is continuance.

The METHODIST doctrine and usage is that they who seem to be converted *are* converted, and should be at once encouraged and received as christians. Plant them in the church. Give to them the comfortable sacrament. If any fall back, and their love

grow cold, call them backsliders ; and as soon as the fire burns brightly again, bring them back to it prayerfully and hopefully — warm them up and try them again.

At first they are “probationers” and if they seem to fail they are not in peril of excommunication and perdition. They are as the shining slops and drops that fall back from a full bucket into a deep well ; — they were brought up from darkness to light ; they fell back ; but then they are not lost for good and all ; we’ll be drawing water again some day.

3. *The same spirit that produced METHODIST revivals and METHODIST theology, brought METHODIST hymns and METHODIST singing to pass.*

If men talk at all they talk their mother tongue. If they sing at all they sing the tunes they know. The METHODISTS did not require the people to learn a sacred Greek or Hebrew language to talk religion withal, nor sacred tunes in which to sing religion. They took the people’s language and the people’s tunes and charged them with the gospel story. They talked and they sang the words and the melodies of the people.

Charles Wesley wrote hymns to match John Wesley’s and George Whitefield’s preaching. That they were christian hymns is proved by the fact that nearly

all churches and sects that use the English tongue to this day print and use them.

Among you, to-day, if any know by heart six christian hymns, be sure that Charles Wesley wrote at least one of them. Listen to :—

Lo ! on a narrow neck of land,
'Twixt two unbounded seas I stand ;
Yet how insensible.

Or :—

Weary of wandering from my God,
And now made ready to return.

Or :—

Stay, thou insulted Spirit, stay !
Though I have done thee such despite.

Or :—

O that my load of sin were gone !
O that I could at last submit !

Or :—

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise !

Or :—

Love divine, all love excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down !

Or :—

Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly.

Or :—

Let saints below in concert sing
With those to glory gone !

Let me quote entire stanzas from this hymn. Is there finer sentiment in our language ?

One family we dwell in him,
One church above, beneath ;
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream, of death !

One army of the living God,
To his command we bow ; —
Part of the host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now.

Is not this equal to that splendid Scripture : Seeing, then, that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run our race with patience !

If the METHODIST CHURCH ever give up her people's melodies and take instead "sacred music" ; if she ever give up the voice of many singers and take instead organs and quartet choirs ; if she ever forsake the passion of christian love breathed by Wesley and take the stately psalm instead : — then will her glory indeed fade ; for the half of her revival power over rude and wicked men will have departed from her.

Children of the heavenly King,
As ye journey sweetly SING.

4. *The METHODIST class and class-meeting ought perhaps to have had the very first place in this statement of useful and peculiar METHODIST devices.*

Originally the class-meeting was a device of financial order and convenience. The early METHODISTS gave money for orphan asylums and missions before they began to build chapels for themselves. They were poor. Their gifts were pennies. Save the pennies. Let these christians be noted by name, from twelve to twenty in a book. Let an honest man be their leader and receive their cash. Let these leaders meet and report weekly to a steward or a preacher ; and if any class-member be not at class-meeting, let the leader look for him and get his penny and his excuse.

Of course it was at once seen that song and prayer and exhortation were in place at these class-meetings. Acquaintance was perfected. Gifts were detected and developed. The class became the nursery of the CHURCH.

No other christian church that I know of has any provision for "watch and care" of its members that for a moment can compare with the classes, class-leaders, class-meetings, leaders' meetings, and Thursday meetings of these METHODISTS. It is Pestalozzi's monitorial school system transferred to the CHURCH.

And to life's end every church-member holds personal and responsible acquaintance with his brethren and his pastor through his class. The enrolled believer who neglects his class, or fails to profit by it, has lost all title to the name METHODIST, and probably, alas! to the name christian also.

5. *The METHODISTS show unusual sagacity and business faculty throughout their entire economy.*

Their name is peculiarly felicitous, — METHODISTS, — men of method, plan-wise people. Any business man can see at a glance that the METHODIST fathers were no fools in finance. The class-meeting penny was the rain-drop unit which by multiplication became a flood. In these latter days of METHODIST millionaires and princely gifts and endowments, it is doubtful whether the consecrated treasure of the church is as large in proportion or as constant as in the earlier days of pennies and punctuality.

The pay of preachers, — so much to the man, so much more if he marry, and so much for each baby ; the pensions for the sick and the superannuated ; the great book-concerns and the distribution of their profits ; the church newspapers and magazines and the appointed editors thereof ; the endowment of academies and colleges ; in short, the manufacturing, the commercial, the literary, the educational, and the finan-

cial business attended to by a METHODIST conference is something astounding to an ordinary ecclesiastic.

Indeed, John Wesley above all preachers that ever lived was versatile and courageous in his christian enterprises. He founded, probably, the first dispensary ever known in London, and was for a time himself the physician and apothecary. He procured and held property to afford a home to widows and aged women. He provided a loan society, such as should be in every church to-day, and with a capital of only fifty dollars relieved two hundred and fifty people in one year and kept the capital whole! He had a head for accounts. His last entry tells his story and preaches a sermon to all christians. Says he :—

“N. B. — For upwards of eighty-six years I have “kept my accounts exactly. I will not attempt it any “longer, being satisfied with the continual conviction “that *I save all I can, and give all I can, that is, all I “have.*” Let us follow Wesley in this, even as he followed Christ.

I have said that the METHODISTS of this country are in transition. The fame of their great achievement arrests general attention. The movement is so great that I cannot measure it. I note the learning of the

preachers and professors ; I see the meeting-houses costly and elaborately appointed ; I hear of endowments of academies, colleges, seminaries, and universities ; I feel the earth tremble as the chariots and horsemen of this great christian army go thundering by. I know where they came from, and the camps they have left, and the victories they have won. God prosper and give them good speed ! But be their achievements what they may, they cannot more bless mankind nor glorify God than have their fathers, who believed in the power of the Holy Spirit to convert and sanctify ; and, going forth empty-handed, have filled the English language with music and with gospel testimonies ; and have added, it may well be, millions of names to the roll of the redeemed.

V.

INDEPENDENT.

BAPTIST AND CONGREGATIONAL.

LECTURE V.

BAPTIST AND CONGREGATIONAL.

“FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM.” — *Matt.* xviii. 20.

A CONGREGATION that finds this Scripture true is contented to have Jesus for company. Other and very famous churches find another Scripture true and are content with Peter for a foundation. Contentment is a great good. With Godliness it is great gain.

A CONGREGATIONALIST (for short CONGREGATIONIST) is one who, being contented with my text, insists that “two or three” believers thereto consenting are a christian church; as such they are competent to all the acts, and they possess all the franchises, which are mentioned in the New Testament as pertaining to any church of Christ on earth.

In Great Britain, the CONGREGATIONISTS are still called by their first name, — INDEPENDENTS. The larger number of CONGREGATIONISTS insist upon immersion as baptism. Such are called BAPTISTS. I

devote this lecture to an exhibition of the uses and excellences of BAPTISTS and CONGREGATIONISTS, or INDEPENDENTS, — a short name when I would speak of both together.

Their history : —

When war is raging between great armies, it is not difficult to trace the marchings hither and thither of the larger bodies. But if the war continue any considerable time, the whole region called “the seat of war” will become alive with scouts and squads and single soldiers, patriot rangers, spies, and a rout besides of adventurers, camp-followers, bummers and thieves. While the achievements of the armies are easily noted, the deeds and misdeeds of this great unorganized multitude can never be correctly told. The noblest heroism and the vilest scoundrelism will find illustration among these rangers and guerillas.

After the same sort, the student of church history finds little difficulty in tracing the great churches that have perfected themselves and their machinery of power, as the Roman, Greek, Nestorian, Anglican, Lutheran, presbyterian, and methodist. But when we ask for the history of BAPTISTS or CONGREGATIONISTS, — INDEPENDENTS, — there is no history of them as a denomination.

Although their numbers have been great, their spirit

heroic, and their success unmistakable, yet they have been like the countless fragments that come rattling down a mountain side in company with and following after great avalanches. The momentum, the thunder, and the fame are with the avalanche ; but the fertility afterward, — the vineyards and the gardens are found chiefly with the fine detritus, the rubbish left along the road where power and greatness went thundering by.

There never has been a day since Paul rebuked Peter, and Barnabas parted from Paul, in which the loyalty of brave men to their convictions has not compelled them into dissent and so-called schism. Around these conscientious, clear-headed men gathers promptly a little company, unable to answer their arguments or resist their personal magnetism. These compact companies glow with intense heat, their enthusiasm amounts to frenzy. If scattered by persecution they are like a rain of fire, igniting wherever they alight.

Such little congregations make no figure in history, yet they have had a very decisive effect upon the behavior and the doctrine of the great churches. Sometimes these congregations have been devotees of falsehood, uncleanness, and folly. At other times they have been clean and bright as dew-drops in the wilderness, shining and going up.

CONGREGATIONAL, then, means nothing in history,

nothing distinctive as good or bad. BAPTIST means nothing in history as good or bad. I take it to be quite impossible to do more, in a survey of the past, than simply to note that separate and independent congregations have been spattered down throughout christendom, and wherever they struck they struck in, and witnessed an *obstinate* confession always ; and many times, of course, a heroic and a christian confession.

It should be borne in mind by all, that not only the so-called CONGREGATIONISTS and BAPTISTS of this country are really congregational, but the spiritualists, unitarians, Swedenborgians, and quakers are also CONGREGATIONISTS. That is to say, whenever any such people come together they are a congregation, and claim to be nothing more.

A man of learning can easily prepare a history of INDEPENDENCY in France ; another history of INDEPENDENCY in Germany, showing how the reformers needed reforming, and how Luther abhorred the re-baptizers or anabaptists ; another history of INDEPENDENCY in England, noting, among other things, how Henry VIII. read his Bible and protested against Rome, and sturdy BAPTISTS read the same Bible and protested against Henry. Rome cursed Henry, and Henry cursed the BAPTISTS.

Hundreds, aye thousands, of INDEPENDENTS have

uttered eloquent testimony in every nation of Europe ; but these separate churches had not, and have not, any organic union. In after years, when by suffering they have paid the price of universal toleration, then these separate churches will salute each other, and note their free agreements, and put forth tendrils ready for graceful intertwinings. And as they draw together they become more and more like a denomination of the presbyterian type.

In this land CONGREGATIONISTS and BAPTISTS began together, having been known in England as INDEPENDENTS, and having suffered together. Yet there was not among these pilgrims a perfect agreement as to the sacraments of the church, or the extent to which civil authority ought to be used to bring conformity to pass. The issue was soon forced in Massachusetts ; and, as all remember, Roger Williams, being convinced that he was himself still unbaptized, and being unable to submit his conscience to the standing CONGREGATIONAL rule, became an exile, and, putting his trust in God, founded the colony Rhode Island and the city Providence upon a “democratical” constitution, ending with these memorable words, — “And let the saints of the Most High walk “in this colony without molestation, in the name of “Jehovah their God, for ever and ever.”

This broad doctrine of religious toleration — freedom of conscience and religious observance — was proclaimed in Maryland also, a Roman catholic colony ; and since those early days has become the common law of christian churches throughout the English-speaking world.

In this land BAPTISTS differ from CONGREGATIONISTS, so called, in their definition of baptism and the logical inferences from that definition.

It is often said that BAPTISTS differ from other christians only as to the *mode* of baptism, — a mere trifle. This is a mistake. To a BAPTIST there is no *mode* of baptism. To cut off a man's head is one mode or sort of amputation, but to cut off his finger is not one mode of decapitation. So christian baptism is one sort or mode of washing ; but all well-meant washings are not modes of baptism ! Because, say the BAPTISTS, christian baptism is (*a*) the immersion in water (*b*) of a christian believer (*c*) in the name of God, — Father, Son, and Spirit. To this sacrament thus defined there are and can be no two modes.

In every regard except this one sacrament and its consequences the CONGREGATIONISTS and BAPTISTS are in perfect accord. Both BAPTISTS and CONGREGATIONISTS in thickly settled regions are coming together in associations, consociations, councils and con-

ferences, and are behaving in all but the name and theory like presbyterians. Here and there all over the land are to be found single churches standing for INDEPENDENCY ; but the tendency with each year is to revert to the presbyterian type, — the tendency to which I alluded in my lecture of that denomination.*

Until twenty years ago the school geographies used to record BAPTISTS as the most populous denomination in this country. Their strength was chiefly at the West and South. (It should be remembered that christian baptism originated in a warm climate.) CONGREGATIONISTS, on the contrary, are a quite small denomination. And it is worthy of mention that both methodists and CONGREGATIONISTS, especially at the South, are perceiving the expediency of administering immersion.

Thus much being premised by way of history of a denomination that has no history, inasmuch as it is not a denomination but a galaxy of stars each twinkling by itself in the dark, I go on to note some of the uses and excellences of these numerous CHURCHES, which are quite independent of each other and yet happen to agree.

I. *The CONGREGATION is the true mother church.*

The CONGREGATION is the raw material out of

* See pages 29, 30.

which all social fabrics are cut ;—the great marble quarry without which not one ecclesiastical temple could ever have been built or ornamented. All churches are of necessity CONGREGATIONAL first, and afterward whatever they may choose to be. In a certain proper sense I may say, too, that all churches are even now CONGREGATIONAL churches, for they are certainly *congregations* ; and if I visit any congregation and ask among them, *Why do you accept this prayer-book ?* they can give but one answer, — *Because we prefer it.* The preference of the congregation settles the constitution of that church. Five thousand people gather in St. Patrick's cathedral, or hang round its windows like bees about their hives in July, a mighty congregation. I question them, one by one, *Why come you here ?* With one consent they answer, *Because we choose to.* Let the five thousand change their mind and their services shall be no more Roman catholic. Thus I say that the CONGREGATIONAL is the mother church. Older than the Roman, old as that first prayer-meeting when the apostles with the women met and prayed, and voted, and cast lots, and, best of all, received the power of the Holy Ghost.

2. *The christian world owes its theory and practice of comprehensive toleration to BAPTISTS and CONGREGATIONISTS, — INDEPENDENTS.*

There are two sides to this question of general toleration or freedom of conscience. The old Jewish church ought to have tolerated Jesus, whom they martyred "ignorantly." "They know not what they do," Jesus himself testified. And thus we see that churches, however venerable and divine, are liable to stone the messengers and slay the Son of the great King, and therefore old churches ought to be tolerant at times.

On the other hand there are acts and evils which no church or society should tolerate for a day. The Hindoo thug is a murderer; and even though he may reckon murder a religious act, he is not to be tolerated. He who kills the body does far less damage than he who ruins the soul of man! If we lay the strong hand on thugs, ought we not to suppress infidels who are casting souls into hell?

Earnest men like Saul find it hard to reconcile sincerity and toleration. They breathe forth threatening and slaughter. They hate the enemies of God with a perfect hatred. Better that men die by thousands than be damned by millions!

Toleration becomes a reasonable doctrine only in the light of experience. After centuries of agony inflicted now by one and now by another sincere persecutor, it has dawned upon men that religious compul-

sions, however desirable, are impossible. They defeat themselves and are therefore absurd.

This doctrine of non-compulsion the INDEPENDENTS have held from a very early age. In the fourth century we find zealous and persecuted Donatists in Africa talking the most advanced nineteenth-century doctrine as to civil and religious freedom: "What has the emperor to do with the church?" asked bishop Donatus, the purist and protestant, fifteen hundred years ago.

Many of these INDEPENDENTS were, of course, BAPTISTS. Persecuted christians necessarily become literalists, *i. e.* accurate in conforming to the letter of their rules, — close copyists of Jesus Christ. Such persons will find comfort in multiplying points of literal agreement between their actions and the actions of Jesus Christ. This tendency may become excessive, puerile. Men have pleaded for beards, and rejected buttons, and curled their hair, and given up houses, refused marriage, and run round naked that they might be as little children, and other like follies, in their desiré to be literal followers and imitators of Jesus Christ. This tendency to literalism leads to the immersion of believers as the only Scriptural baptism.

Here then I note :—

3. *The christian church has been incessantly pruned*

and brought back to primitive simplicity and truth by the sharp surgery of these INDEPENDENTS again.

The foundation of christian faith is Jesus Christ, Paul says. An imitation of Jesus is the guide for christian endeavor. But love is always garlanding the beloved. Love is a creator. Love is all the time beautifying. The literal imitator of Jesus, if not hardened by opposition, will in a very few generations outgrow his literalism. The sharp and severe outlines of truth and duty will be lost sight of under ornaments and beautifyings, — additions all.

This luxuriance, like tropical vegetation, by and by becomes a tangle, a mat, a rot, a stink. That which in the beginning was an act of grace and love becomes a heavy burden and a superstition. The free gifts of gratitude by translation become the extortions of an avaricious church. Sacraments expressing christian love and hope become acts mystic and magical. Priests inveigle victims by performing priestly acts, or terrify the dying by withholding them, — as if God would ever allow any man to send his brother man to heaven or hell !

The axe, the bill-hook, and fire can alone clear off such snaky swamps and let up a new growth. The remedy for the corruption of an old church is to go back to first principles and develop a new church.

Potatoes are propagated by roots, — each year's growth is but a continuation of last year's. So, too, strawberries are propagated by offsets from the old vines. Grapevines are propagated by cuttings, — little pieces of the old vines set a growing ; and fruit-trees by grafted scions, — old-fashioned, but set on new stocks.

But it sometimes happens that blight or rot or mildew, or some disease, affects certain stocks. At once the cultivator secures health by going back of roots, offsets, cuttings and scions, — back to the seed, and propagating new generations. Thus have come to pass our choicest and healthiest varieties, — *seedlings*.

In like manner we find that in all ages when blight, corruption, mildew, and death have affected this or that great church, earnest men of prayer have naturally gone back and propagated from the seed ; and thus have come to pass new varieties of the old things, new samples of the work of the Spirit, renewing the hearts and rearranging the societies of men. BAPTISTS and CONGREGATIONISTS, — INDEPENDENTS are these seedling churches, primitive and pure.

4. CONGREGATION *came very near to being the most obvious church name in the New Testament.*

Ah me ! and alas ! on what a slender thread hang everlasting things ! We CONGREGATIONISTS came within a hair of having the English Bible all on our side, — our CHURCH the only true church. Just think of it ! All others dissenters ! But no. King James, notwithstanding his puritan training and his presbyterian professions in open kirk, in addition to his religion professed kingcraft also when he came to the throne of England, and sided with “The Church” because “The Church” was essential to the throne. And so when the Bible was to be revised or re-translated, he gave the revisers certain rules, among them this :—

RULE 3*d*. *Old ecclesiastical words to be kept ; namely, as the word “church” not to be translated “congregation.”*

Think what a different book the New Testament would be if, wherever the word “church” now appears, the King had only let the translators write simply “gathering” or “congregation !” Think how respectable that would have made us at once, to have our church order the only Scriptural one !

But soberly, both Scripture and common sense demonstrate, as we have seen, that all churches must be first CONGREGATIONAL and afterward whatever they may chance or choose. The substance of which all churches do consist is the congregation. The congre-

gation gives them character. I cannot conceive of a magnificent regiment in which the officers and men are all drunk ; nor of a contemptible regiment in which the officers and men are all soldiers and patriots. It is the congregation that gives character to the church, not the church to the congregation. Perceiving this : —

5. *The CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH can be peculiarly catholic and charitable toward other churches.*

Sectarianism, always a blemish, is inexcusable in a CONGREGATIONIST, because his fundamental principle is, Let every congregation act its own pleasure, accountable to God only.

If, then, any congregation choose to become presbyterian, the CONGREGATIONIST replies : — *Certainly ! Do as you please.* Another congregation prefers methodism : — *Certainly. We do as we like. Let every congregation be clearly persuaded in its own mind.* No CONGREGATIONIST has any business to find fault with the action of any other church. What he claims for himself he must allow to others, whether they allow it to him or not. Being himself utterly free, he should allow to all what he claims for himself.

6. *A CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH can act promptly and heartily, not being entangled with side interests.*

Great denominations are unwieldy. They cannot

stop, start, turn out, or change. Indeed, they brag of this their bigness. When a man falls overboard, a row-boat can reach him quicker than a ship. If an emergency arises, a CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH can meet it quicker than a great denomination can. For great, costly, and lasting works, the great denominations are responsible workers. For new, sudden, transient duty, the CONGREGATIONAL churches ought to be promptly interested. The elephant can push off a ship into the water, but cannot catch a mouse ; a kitten can catch a mouse, but can launch no ship larger than an eggshell.

All doubtful ventures and experiments should be tried by CONGREGATIONISTS first, as little boats go ahead of great ships to make soundings and buoy out the channel. If the little boat gets sunk on this perilous errand, the big ship can pick up the swimmers. In this same line : —

7. CONGREGATIONISM *offers few temptations to ecclesiasts and church lawyers.*

An ecclesiast is a man who works in and by church machinery. He is an official. A christian is a man who lives by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and does good as he has opportunity, in or out of office. The larger the mill, the more wheels and machinists are needed. The larger the church, the more eccle-

siasts are needed. Church usages, canonical law, venerable tradition, will become a lifelong study. A man skilled in these things will administer the affairs of a denomination. A derangement in one part of the great organism may easily jar and set a grinding every other part.

But pure CONGREGATIONISM has no machinery. A question once up is quickly settled. If a CHURCH take fire, it is a "detached risk." There is no chance for ecclesiastical busybodies to pettifog the Holy Ghost out of mind and memory, substituting for his blessed inspiration rules and by-laws and precedent.

8. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES *can keep near to Scripture with little effort, because they have nothing to hamper or prejudice them.*

You have noticed that trees wear, even in old age, the warps and scars of their youth. The casualties of each year affect the growth of the next. But there are some shrubs, like the raspberry and blackberry, that every season send up fair shoots from the root, and the bruises and frostings of the old stock do not affect this new and vigorous growth from the earth. Cut away the old wood, and let every year's berry-harvest be taken from the last and stoutest growth.

So should CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES be in their successive generations. Rooted in a scriptural faith,

each generation should grow up rooted and grounded for itself, and not warped or twisted by the sins, growths, and strifes of the past.

Each generation should read and think for itself, just as each generation eats and assimilates food for itself and makes growth. Religion is a spiritual life. It can be propagated, but not bequeathed. Every baby must do his own growing, no matter how tall his grandfather was ; and every babe in Christ must do his own growing, no matter how excellent the church nursery and lofty the stature of the "elders."

It is a peculiar excellence of all true and courageous CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES that they need have no tradition between them and the Bible, and so can and ought to understand Scripture far better than other churches.

I say can and ought to. I do not say that they do. For the freedom that permits approach to the gospel fountain to drink, every man for himself, is also freedom to wander in desert and stony places, to be cast down of devils and fill the darkness with incoherent howlings.

The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.

Because, then, an INDEPENDENT CHURCH is, as we have seen, a true congregation, ready to take any shape that may be for edification ;—

And because in its feebleness and necessity it must needs preach and practise universal toleration, and sometimes attain even unto charity ;—

And because in its loneliness it is driven into close company with the words of Jesus and away from the traditions of men ;—

And because whenever the word “ church ” occurs in the New Testament the well-informed reader sees “ CONGREGATION ” shining through ;—

And because like David, the light-footed and bold, the INDEPENDENT can snatch a sling and call on God, and go quickly to slay Goliath ;—

And because a little CHURCH offers no temptation to ecclesiasts and high-priests ; its fury and fights, if they come, are but as fire in a detached house ;—

And because an INDEPENDENT CHURCH asks for and needs no book of guidance but the teachings of Christ and the apostles ;—

And, finally, because an INDEPENDENT CHURCH may take without contradiction, and profit by, whatever good is found in any and all other churches ; may prove all things and hold fast the good ; may declare fellowship with all, and christian love, without any sacrifice of

consistency or principle ; and may itself become an epitome and illustration of all that is good in all the rest : —

Therefore an INDEPENDENT CHURCH, however insignificant, seems to me extremely attractive ; a very pleasant little tabernacle in which two or three pilgrim saints bound for the holy City may meet and rest, and talk about the great temple, and the uncounted company of the redeemed who shall sing the new song there. Their names are already written in heaven.

And as often as they turn aside from their pilgrim path on earth, they seek and find in their little tabernacles all that any church on earth can give. FOR, WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, said Jesus, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM.

VI.

LIBERAL CHRISTIAN.

LECTURE VI.

LIBERAL CHRISTIAN.

OF A TRUTH I PERCEIVE THAT GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS : BUT IN EVERY NATION, HE THAT FEARETH HIM, AND WORKETH RIGHTEOUSNESS, IS ACCEPTED WITH HIM. — *Acts x.* 34, 35.

THE number of UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS in this city (Elmira) is by no means inconsiderable. They are not, however, gathered into any one church, but are found among the attendants upon all our churches, and wherever found are rendering peculiar and important service to the cause of truth and religion.

To indicate and gratefully acknowledge some of these services rendered by UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS to the cause of christian truth is the intent of this lecture.

A UNITARIAN is, strictly speaking, one who affirms that God is a unit, and a unit only. So Jesus quoted to the scribe, — *The Lord our God is one Lord*; and so the scribe unreprieved replied, — *There is one God, and there is none other but he.* Accordantly a UNITARIAN denies that the Son and the Holy Ghost are very God.

A UNIVERSALIST is, strictly speaking, one who affirms that all men shall be, sooner or later, saved, — not one shall be lost. *God*, he says, *will have all men to be saved. In Christ shall all be made alive.* Salvation, safety, is universal, say they, and so they are called UNIVERSALISTS.

But these definitions do not do justice to the people who are called UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS. Indeed they find it impossible to describe themselves or write their own creed.

Neither do these two classes of people necessarily belong together. Though they agree upon many topics, yet the two denominations fuse and flow reluctantly in one stream, to be called LIBERAL CHRISTIANS.

To one familiar with the history of christian doctrine and the growth of systematic theology, the existence and usefulness of UNITARIAN and UNIVERSALIST protestants seem well-nigh inevitable. They must needs come to pass. It cannot be otherwise. See! —

Men must reason. Men must pry into the unknown. Men always believe more than they can prove. If they build up from the bottom a substantial temple, fact on fact, they are scientific reasoners. If they take wing and fly up on high to make discoveries, then they are prophetic or poetic reasoners.

Of course the scientific reasoners are the safer rea-

soners. If astronomers, for instance, reason aright, the punctual planets will prove the reasoning true. If they reason erroneously, the stars in their courses will fight against them. The safety of scientific reasoning is in this fact, that we are compelled to verify our conclusions by new appeals to Nature herself. We can build our house very high, but it will surely fall unless it be founded upon a rock, and be built up like one house of a great block, or one tower of a great temple, agreeing in style and strength with the rest of the structure.

But when men have certain great spiritual facts or thoughts given to them, relating to beings and worlds and experiences unseen yet influential, they cannot help reasoning about them, adjusting them so as to show their consistency, or arranging them so as to discern their law and gain some momentum or help toward the computation of truth not yet revealed.

These reasonings are scientific in their form, but not in their substance. When two such reasoners compare their views, it is not like the comparison of two astronomers looking out at the stars, or two chemists re-performing the same experiment, or two accountants summing again the same stubborn figures. But it is two thinkers telling their thoughts, — two dreamers comparing dreams. The stones of which they build their

imposing structures are not stubborn facts of the external or material world ; but are ideas which have no existence except in the minds of these “great thinkers.” For the hearer outside, these ideas live in words. But what word ever spoken by man is equivalent to the idea which he meant to express by it? These dreamers, therefore, or theologians, are in fact comparing words, though they suppose themselves to be comparing views ; and their structures are built of words ; and their reasonings are word-reasonings ; and their strifes are “strifes about words.”

In process of time these word-heaps will become so vast and high that none but the more learned can rightly appreciate their structure. The unlearned have neither time nor ability to follow the subtle word-trimming and word-fitting ; and so, as common people believe an almanac though they cannot compute one, the common people of the church believe the creed though they cannot build it or prove it.

Thus the fathers cease from doctrine, *i. e.* teaching, and begin dogma, *i. e.* assertion, — “the which except every one do keep whole, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly,” they pleasantly assure us.

The only check upon theological rationalism is the collision that must come to pass between these rationalizing theologians. But if, unfortunately, any one

phase of rationalism gain the ascendancy over all others, so as to be able to destroy or silence the rest, then at once this victorious creed becomes the chariot of reason run away headlong ; and no man can predict to what lengths of essential absurdity, yet verbal consistency, the uncontrolled steeds will not go.

Of these general principles the history of every doctrine in the christian church affords illustration. I will exhibit two or three.

1. *Of the Trinity* : —

Opening the New Testament, we find the words Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We find trinitarian proof-texts, and, of course, UNITARIAN proof-texts also. Early christians, receiving the facts of the gospel, out of warm hearts began their doxologies, in which we discern a certain threeness, neither more nor less than what we discern in the New Testament. By and by some are annoyed by the insult offered to reason by saying that three are one and that one is three. One class will hold fast the intelligible *one* and question the mysterious *three*. Another class will hold fast the experimental *three* and question the mysterious *one*. It must needs be, if men reason about God, they will become rationalistic UNITARIANS or else rationalistic trinitarians, between whom I know not that there is any great choice.

It happened — I say *happened* — that rationalistic trinitarians at one time and another in influential councils of the church have out-voted the UNITARIANS ; and so, ages long since, by vote of a majority it was settled what was orthodoxy and what was heresy. And when trinitarians had purged themselves of all UNITARIAN errors, having turned out the heretics and consigned them to a double death, then began a magnificent riot and runaway of reason, triumphing in creed statements, of which common men judged as they did of old-fashioned medicines, — the worse the taste the better the physic, — the more startling the statement and seemingly absurd, the deeper the reasoning that demonstrates it and the piety that accepts it without question. Thus dogma took the place of doctrine, or, in plain English, *assertion* took the place of *teaching*. Uncontradicted doctors smote Reason in the face in the name of religion. I cannot better make you understand these statements than by reading to you pure and simple what is called the Athanasian creed.

“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith.

“Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

“And the catholic faith is this :— That we worship “one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.

“Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance.

“For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

“But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one ; the glory equal, the majestic co-eternal.

“Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

“The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate.

“The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.

“The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

“And yet they are not three eternals, but one Eternal.

“As also they are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one Uncreated and one Incomprehensible.

“So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Ghost almighty.

“And yet there are not three almighties, but one Almighty.

“So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.

“And yet there are not three gods, but one God.

“So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and
“the Holy Ghost Lord.

“And yet not three lords, but one Lord.

“For like as we are compelled by the christian
“verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be
“God and Lord ; so are we forbidden by the catholic
“religion to say, there be three gods, or three lords.

“The Father is made of none, neither created nor
“begotten.

“The Son is of the Father alone ; not made, nor
“created, but begotten.

“The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son ;
“neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceed-
“ing.

“So there is one Father, not three fathers ; one
“Son, not three sons ; one Holy Ghost, not three holy
“ghosts.

“And in this Trinity none is afore or after other ;
“none is greater or less than another.

“But the whole three Persons are co-eternal togeth-
“er and co-equal.

“So that in all things as is aforesaid, the Unity in
“Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

“He therefore that will be saved must thus think
“of the Trinity.”

And yet I venture to say that no *unlettered* man ever did so think of the Trinity ; neither can he so think of the Trinity if he try ; and he who tries until he seems to have succeeded, will probably have so damaged his understanding by the effort, as to be saved, not by the creed he has swallowed, but because of the compassion universally accorded to the feeble-minded, the crazy, or the otherwise irresponsible.

So long as the orthodox church flaunts the Athanasian creed as a banner, so long there will be need of opposing ranks to declare the rights of reason and of private judgment and well-ordered speech.

But whenever, as by the episcopal church in this country, this creed banner is furled, and warlike trinitarianism ceases its unchristian threatfulness, straight-way the errand of UNITARIANISM *in that direction* ceases ; and we shall find, as we find to-day, conspicuous UNITARIANS praying to the Lord Jesus, and conspicuous trinitarians preaching the humanity and graces, as well as grace, of Jesus of Nazareth.

In this so great congregation doubtless more than one half of you have never listened to an old-fashioned trinitarian or UNITARIAN sermon. You would find it hard to believe that such discourses were ever written, or, being written, were listened to. But if at any time pastors begin to preach the Athanasian

creed, depend upon it the Spirit of God will raise up equally mistaken UNITARIANS for their destruction, even as in India the devastation of the wild hog is something tempered by the ravening tiger. That land, however, is most to be desired as a home, which is neither cursed by wild hogs nor saved by tigers.

Against another dogma of rationalizing or system-making orthodoxy, UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS equally protest.

2. *Of man's depravity and its origin.*

Every man has found it experimentally true, that, when he would do good, evil is present with him. If any man say he is without sin, he deceiveth himself. We cannot do the things that we would. Death has passed upon all men for that all have sinned. Here is a universal, experimental truth, common to all religions, certified by every intelligent conscience on the globe. Here is a fact. Reason begins to inquire as to the age of this fact, and the cause of this fact, — the dimensions and degree of this depravity. Such inquiries are natural. They are inevitable.

So will come to pass orthodox reasoners. And partly from Scripture and partly from their own deep and gloomy consciousness they will develop the doctrine of man's total inability, his utter and entire depravity. Being unable to find its beginning in this

generation, and as little in the one preceding, and so back and up the stream of time, they come by a logical necessity to the first man. What can they do except say that "In Adam's fall we sinned all"? One doctor in one way and another in another will show the reasonableness and justness of lodging a whole race and its destinies in the loins of one man, and making the issue of heaven or hell for inconceivable millions of the groaning or rejoicing to depend upon the behavior of this one man at one trial or test of his virtue.

Now when men have been promiscuously damned for a generation or two, and every priest and every preacher has denounced them because of their sin (and this they indeed deserve), because of their sin not only, but also has called it original sin, — sin that was born with them, — sin that came from father Adam, — sin that damned them before they were born, — sin that compels a million or more of helpless heathen to curl in everlasting anguish to every one saint that has escaped and attained the heavenly felicity! By and by insulted reason, bruised and sad at heart, will hear a strange new melody in the simple words spoken a thousand times, — OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN, — and by a blessed insurrection will burst the bonds of a long captivity; will

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deny with Pelagius that babies are born devils ; deny that all men sinned in Adam and are justly condemned for his transgression ; deny that God hates men and stands a consuming fire, their most dreadful enemy.

So it will come to pass that the same quality of mind that protests against the Athanasian creed in its excesses will also protest against the cold, inhuman theories as to evil in Adam and the consequent perdition of his posterity.

On a protest like this UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS will be in very close sympathy. By and by, when these christian brethren have suffered hardness as good soldiers a sufficient length of time, the effect of their protest will be readily detected in the teachings and creeds of all the so-called orthodox churches. There is not a church in this city, nor a minister of the gospel of any creed, who dares to preach, as his own faith, any one of a half-dozen sermons on the fall in Adam and the imputation of his sin to his posterity, — sermons of men like Timothy Dwight, or Dr. Bellamy, or Dr. Emmons, or Jonathan Edwards.

But citizens all ! whether orthodox or liberal, religious or irreligious, rationalistic or simple-minded in your faith, I take you to witness in this hour, that by the testimony of your own condemning conscience,

accusing and not excusing ; by the spectacle of your past life and its pathway strewn with broken purposes of good ; by the fearfulness of your own thought of judgment and exact reckoning with God ; by the volume of those many secret thoughts, selfish, sinful, unlovely, which you dare not confess to your nearest friend : by these resistless evidences and testimonies I certify and accuse you that ye are erring sinful men ; that we all like lost sheep have gone astray. And while I thank UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS for having something humbled the cruel rationalism of orthodoxy, and compelled something like meek and gentle utterance from the theologians of to-day, yet the fact, the gloomy, dreadful fact with which these theologians *began* their reasonings nor UNITARIAN nor UNIVERSALIST, alas ! can ever deny or destroy. No heresy can extirpate sin and death.

In the same general way rational UNIVERSALISTS have been needed as a counterpoise to the rational damnationists. Be it always remembered that religion is above reason.

3. *Of everlasting punishment* :—

The christian religion has this in common with all other religions, that it is a plan of salvation, — a plan by which men may escape, or at least hope to escape, the evil to come ; evil which cannot be better ex-

pressed than in the words of Scripture, — a fearful looking for of judgment to come and fiery indignation.

Men must reason. They will theorize as to the detail of this eternal woe. By and by we shall find the pious poets of perdition hardening their visions slowly into dogmas of damnation.

Men will become so wonted to a lurid background to the gospel picture, that they can with difficulty conceive of a gospel or a grace of God, if by any chance the pit of hell should prove to have a bottom or the fires thereof be ever quenched.

Richard Baxter could not perfect his "*Saint's Rest*," except he first depict the sinner's torment. Hear him :—

"The principal author of hell torments is God himself. As it was no less than God whom the sinner had offended, so it is no less than God who will punish them for their offences. He hath prepared these torments for his enemies."

"The torments of the damned must be extreme, because they are the effect of divine vengeance. Wrath is terrible, but revenge is implacable. When the great God shall say, 'My rebellious creatures shall now pay for all the abuse of my patience; remember how I waited your leisure in vain, how I stooped to persuade and entreat you. Did you think I would

“always be so slighted?’ Then he will be revenged
“for every abused mercy!”

“Consider also that though God had rather men
“would accept of Christ and mercy, yet when they
“persist in rebellion, *he will take pleasure* in their
“execution.”

“The guilt of their sins will be to damned souls like
“tinder to gunpowder, to make the flames of hell take
“hold upon them with fury. The body must also bear
“its part. That body which was so carefully looked
“to, so tenderly cherished, so curiously dressed, what
“must it now endure?”

“But the greatest aggravation of these torments
“will be their eternity. When a thousand millions of
“ages are past, they are as fresh to begin as the first
“day. If there were any hope of an end, it would
“ease the damned to foresee it; but *forever* is an intol-
“erable thought. They were never weary of sinning,
“nor will God be weary of punishing. They never
“heartily repented of sin, nor will God repent of their
“suffering.”

“What if thou shouldst see the devil appear to thee
“in some terrible shape! Would not thy heart fail
“thee and thy hair stand on an end? And how wilt
“thou endure to live forever, where thou shalt have no
“other company but devils and the damned!”

That the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is no longer thus represented by christian preachers and theological writers, and that the moral sense of all who hear these terrible words is shocked at their inhumanity, is due in large measure to the determined and incessant protest of UNIVERSALISTS.

Thus as to the Trinity, the origin of evil, and the nature and duration of eternal punishment, we have noticed a little in detail the chastening which speculative and pseudo-scientific orthodoxy has received at the hands of protesting UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS. In these particulars their work has been a negative work, — strong and passionate denial.

But they have been allowed to afford valuable affirmative contributions also to the general consciousness of the christian church. Writers like Thomas à Kempis have sufficiently developed the mystic and passionate sympathy of the christian soul with Christ; but the Christ of Thomas à Kempis and of similar writers is not a man pure and simple. And we owe to distinctively UNITARIAN writers the emphatic assertion that *Jesus was a real man*. Ernest Renan, while he shocks every christian reader by his scientific incredulity, his denial of miracles, and his rejection of Christ our God, nevertheless profits also every christian reader by the breadth and depth and vividness of that

historic man Jesus of Nazareth. Be it remembered always that Jesus was a model man as well as a revealed God. To deny or forget his humanity is as great a loss to the christian as to deny or forget his divinity. It is as important to know what manner of man we may hope to become as it is to know what manner of being God is.

For wholesome views of what the race of man has become by reason of sin, I bid you consult the testimony of the so-called orthodox. For equally wholesome views of what man may become by the grace of God, I bid you consult the delineations of Jesus Christ furnished to us and to the church of God by the better class of UNITARIAN writers.

That is a truly christian church in which the members adore the sovereignty of God with Dr. Emmons, and walk with Jesus whom Dr. Channing loved but feared to worship.

In like manner of the UNIVERSALISTS I note :—*The changeless love and fatherhood of God* is their contribution to christian consciousness.

Many men are timid in giving utterance to this great truth, lest they seem to subtract from the justice of God as a "righteous moral governor." Having unconsciously built up the law into a pile that overtops God himself, theologians unwittingly present us with

a God who seems in perplexity how to indulge his fatherly inclinations without damage to his government. *How can he be just and yet justify?* is the question that fills theologians with anxiety.

The UNIVERSALIST has reminded us that the fatherhood of God, and that he has a heart, are truths quite as important as the governorship of God and that he has a law. The christian truth is that God who was in the dying Christ cannot be more emphatically revealed than he was then and there, as the great-hearted, devoted, self-sacrificing, loving Father; and at the same awful moment all may read, too, that the wages of sin is death; sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death, and God will by no means clear the guilty.

At our peril we let go of either truth, — the love of God so magnified by the UNIVERSALISTS, or the terror of the Lord so incessantly proclaimed by the orthodox.

We may notice, too, that *these Unitarians and Universalists have usually rendered their testimony at considerable cost to themselves.*

Contrary to what we should expect, magnanimity and compassion are not the attributes of God popularly acceptable. The masses of men being selfish and inclined to tyrannize, readily accept a tyrannic, passionate, tormenting God; for such a God they would

themselves be if they had a chance. And although one would suppose that men would like to hear the sweet-sung prophecies of universal and indiscriminate salvation, yet as a matter of fact the priests and preachers who scare people, and then admit them to safety at a reasonable cost, and by a mode sufficiently mysterious, have always been more popular than the philosophic and philanthropic UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS.

Whatever of excellence and of credit belongs to men who assert unpopular convictions at cost to themselves is due to great numbers of UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS. There are regions, of course, such as Boston and Cambridge, where scholarly and rational UNITARIANISM or Deism is at once an elegant speculation and a popular creed. But as a general rule these brethren are in a minority ; and when they hold fast their faith, and with reasonable modesty declare their dissent from prevailing creeds, their courage and independent thought are truly excellent ; and their chastening effect upon the general christian consciousness is not less to their credit, in that it has been rarely acknowledged and never welcome.

It will be found, too, that *these brethren are promoters of intelligence and defenders of our public schools as being in themselves a positive good regardless of and*

separable from religion. They will be found at work with the more intelligent of all denominations in every enterprise of public spirit and material welfare.

Being less encumbered with metaphysical theories and dogmatic systems than many, they can liberate a larger force of money and work and enthusiasm wherewith to attack and destroy the evils of to-day. These brethren will see and declare that to-day is the matrix of to-morrow. That this year is mother of next year. That our life in the flesh is the germ of our life in the spirit, and that he who does the best possible thing for to-day is doing also the best possible thing for to-morrow and for all days. Their danger will be of excessive worldliness, which very tendency is the antidote and limit for excessive other worldliness, which is superstition.

Not dreaming that I have anything near exhausted my subject, I must nevertheless make an end.

As in previous lectures of this course, so in this, I have carefully abstained from indicating many vital points upon which I suppose UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS each in their way have erred from truth, — erred as widely as they say that I have. Our differences are fundamental. They have been topics of controversy between earnest men ever since the second century.

As a mathematician I shall never attempt to square the circle. I shall never again invent perpetual motion. These two problems have received sufficient attention. For the same reason I here and everywhere decline to take part in any controversy that for sixteen hundred years has attracted earnest minds, disputing as to the Godhead, the person of Christ, the origin, and term of evil, and the destiny of the human race. A controversy that has raged so long is not likely ever to come to an end. The problems involved are insoluble until, being born again, we see the kingdom of God.

Nay, more. Upon opening the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments a tranquil and contented christian cannot fail to perceive that very broad and plain testimonies are there given, which at least seem to justify the so-called errors of UNITARIANS and UNIVERSALISTS. And I know not in what direction to look for an authoritative and final exposition of Scripture.

So long as they call on God, lifting up holy hands without wrath or doubting, and, with me, are prompt and heartfull in saying Our Father which art in heaven, who am I that I *need* judge the servant of another? What am I that with condemning zeal I should denounce my brethren?

Without meaning to or needing to surrender one point of the faith called orthodox, nor softening one of its hard and exact lines of what I call truth, it has seemed to me altogether possible that citizens of one city and incarnate souls worshipping God in one great congregation, differ as they may upon their speculative and dogmatic systems, may also walk together in mutual respect and in co-operations absolute and whole-hearted, in whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report.

FOR, OF A TRUTH, I PERCEIVE THAT GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS : BUT IN EVERY NATION, HE THAT FEARETH HIM, AND WORKETH RIGHTEOUSNESS, IS ACCEPTED WITH HIM.

VII.

CHOOSING ONE'S CHURCH.

LECTURE VII.

CHOOSING ONE'S CHURCH.

“WHAT SHALL WE THEN SAY TO THESE THINGS?” — *Romans* viii. 31.

A LECTURE of review and general remark seems called for at this point, in order to utilize some of the truth which has been gained by the study in detail of OUR SEVEN CHURCHES.*

1. To admit the excellence of SEVEN different CHURCHES, and allow to each of them the title “christian” may disturb the faith of some, and cause others to fall into indifferentism, if not contempt for all churches.

I have seen children whose joy in the possession of an apple, an orange, and a stick of candy at a picnic was something less because every other boy and girl of the Sunday school received a similar gift. In like manner some men cannot enjoy their own church, unless able to look down upon others and

* Roman catholic, presbyterian, episcopal, methodist episcopal, baptist, congregational, and liberal christian.

say, *Mine is better than yours.* An effort to show that all churches are good enfeebles the relish of them who enjoy chiefly the conviction that their own church is best.

2. But beside these are many who are endeavoring to lead a christian life without any church. Some of these go so far as to avow dislike of all churches. They declare that, as administered by men and among men, churches are so childish, selfish, and corrupt that the christian believer would better let them all alone. *Church organization*, say they, *is anti-Christ.*

Such should remember the words and the example of Jesus Christ:—The scribes and pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.* And again he told the leper whose flesh after years of scab and dryness had come to him as the flesh of a little child: Go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded.† Of all churches that have blessed or cursed mankind, none has been and none can ever be straiter or stronger or more denominational than this church of Israel; and, on the other hand, of all men that have ever dwelt in churches and received benefit, attaining in them a spiritual stature that made them superior to all

* Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.

† Matt. viii. 4.

churches, no better sample can be found than Jesus of Nazareth in this narrow church of Israel. In short, the world's straitest sect and the world's broadest man appear in history as mother church and dutiful son.

These precepts and this example of Jesus Christ should forever discourage the inclination, too frequently gratified in these latter days, to break away from churches and organizations for the sake of liberty and spiritual growth. We need to attain to a Christ-like reverence for tradition and love of church on the one hand, and an equally Christ-like radicalism and independence of thought on the other.

Churches are related to spiritual development as dock-yards are to great ships, that defy the storm, because they have been made strong in docks quiet as duck-ponds. No ships can be built at sea. But for the law, prophets, and church of Israel there had been no Simeons, Annas, Elizabeths, nor blessed Mary and her Son. Abolish churches, and there can be no pious drill, nor propagation of a holy seed, nor building up in this world a household of faith. Every christian must say to himself: *I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. It is not my business to find fault with churches and pull them down, but rather to strengthen the things that remain and are*

likely to perish. And while I am profiting by my own church home, it is good to know that many other churches are also enjoying the presence of God, in whom all the families of earth are called.

3. Each one of our SEVEN CHURCHES of which I have spoken claims the name "Christian." Each one appeals to Scripture in demonstration of its truth and excellence.

This is very discreditable to the Bible, if the Bible was intended as a form-book for the regulation of details, dress, and ceremony, or even of dogma among God's children. For in these particulars it has failed ignominiously. But it is highly creditable to the Bible and its many-sidedness, and its deep wells of refreshment on every side, if we suppose the Bible to be a storehouse of God, wherefrom the children of his love may draw daily rations of food and drink for souls that hunger and thirst after righteousness, each one receiving according to his several necessity; just as from that other storehouse of God, the earth, he giveth food in every variety, according to the need of bird and beast and fish and reptile and of man himself. As a book of ecclesiastical regulations the Bible is a failure. As a repast for saints the Bible is a marvelous success.

And so these SEVEN CHURCHES all profess them-

selves christian, and they all love the holy Bible, and they all say so, if not wisely, let us at least admit honestly. And upon earth there is no tribunal before which we can send up our church attorneys to show their proofs, and plead their causes, and ask for a final decree establishing them and their clients as the true church of God, — the only one upon earth warranted by Scripture.

Where there is no tribunal there can be no decision ; and where no decision there can be no end to strife, if strife be once begun. Therefore let christians cease from controversy ; let nothing be done through strife or for vain glory ; but each and every church being clearly persuaded in its own mind will, in its contentment, attain to silence and dignity and magnanimity. Even the ox doth not low over his fodder. They that are noisiest in church boastfulness give evidence that they are least at rest. Woe unto that servant who, when his Lord cometh, shall be found beating, abusing, or accusing his fellow-servants !

4. A plausible and beautiful theory is entertained by some, that these SEVEN or more differing CHURCHES are in fact a device of our Lord by which he is distributing the gifts of the Spirit, and making provision for the grades and types of spiritual character that he

would bring to pass among men. A beautiful theory I say. Beyond all question there is need of such gradings and classifications in the great university of salvation. If the church of one's childhood insists upon statements of truth somewhat strait and hard, either the growing man will be pinched, or the church bond will be burst, or he must be promoted and enlarged in an orderly and regular way. It is pleasant to think that these SEVEN or more CHURCHES are different classes of one great church ; and that when a man changes his church it is for cause and for good.

We should avoid the error of the conservative. Says he, *God is without variableness or shadow of turning. Religious truth is God's truth, therefore religion is without variableness. That alone is true which is old.* Here is a fallacy. For as the sunrise, and the moon's phases, and the tides are facts with the fisher-boy and with the astronomer alike, yet the thought of them, and the use of them, and the words spoken about them by Sir John Herschel and by the sailor in his smack differ widely. God, and all things proceeding from him, — in a word, truth, — does not change. But a man's apprehension of truth and his declarations of truth change, unless, indeed, a man have stupefied himself or been overtaken by spiritual atrophy and death.

The sacrifice offered by Jesus the Christ of God is a

fact to the child spell-bound by the crucifixion story, and to the thoughtful man, who is questioning about the lamb slain from the foundation of the world and the doctrine of a universal, an incessant, and a divine sacrifice. But the boy and the man will have widely differing thoughts and words about this eternal fact of sacrifice.

A full creed for a man and a full creed for a boy must needs differ. The church of one's boyhood cannot be the church of one's manhood except it be a church of grades and classes. Jesus himself classified his hearers and spoke differently to different classes. In the letters of Paul we find traces of grades and classes in the churches to whom he addressed his letters : — "Ye which are *spiritual*," he says ; "as many as will be *perfect*," and other phrases of like suggestion.

In these days of graded schools, it is strange that religious instruction should still be given in the clumsy and miscellaneous way that used to disgrace our common district schools. It were well, therefore, were it possible, to have in every church four or five grades or classes of religious disciples ; — the catechumens, the neophytes, the disciples, the spiritual, and the perfect. And as Jesus was able by the indwelling Spirit rightly to divide the word of truth, giving a blessing to the little children, and the deep things of God himself to

his riper friends, — truths which even they could not understand, but had need to wait for the interpretations of the Spirit, — so the pastor of a christian church ought to be neither a novice, nor a completed man dry and inelastic, but like the great Teacher, with easy words for children and deep things of God wherewith to astonish and stagger the most athletic intellect that can be found in his flock.

The next best thing to a graded church is, so the theory goes, the incidental gradations and opportunities for culture afforded by our SEVEN or seventeen CHURCHES ; and this one benefit compensates in large measure for the staring evil and costliness of our sectarian divisions.

Perhaps there is a little truth in this. Let us hope that more souls are fed, and well fed, by our many churches, than could be fed by one catholic church. But I am not able to verify this theory in any considerable detail. We cannot classify existing denominations. We cannot decide that this one is an infant-school, and that secondary, a third grammar, and a fourth academic. Our churches as a general thing would rather be ungraded, clumsy district-schools with one algebra scholar on exhibition, than populous, useful infant-schools, where all are simple, child-like, and all are growing.

The beautiful theory aforesaid breaks down ignominiously when we inspect the churches in this land of voluntarism. For as pebbles that lie along the level seashore tend more and more toward one shape and lose their angularity, so in any democratic society the tendency is toward a loss of singularity among men, and a reduction of people by ceaseless attrition, and a general enslavement to public opinion, to a cornerless and meaningless average. In other words, dress, character, religion, politics, are not shaped according to any predetermined standard or pattern; but they come to pass. Men take shape and build up society pretty much as pebbles do gravel-banks.

Thus it has come to pass in at least five out of OUR SEVEN CHURCHES, that, except on rare occasions, a visitor has need to ask at the close of public worship the name of the church that has made him welcome. And all that saves the other two churches from a like uniformity is the necessity in one of clinging to a liturgy, and in the other of holding fast to a dead language. Even in these (I allude, of course, to the episcopal and Roman catholic), if any one enter and stay for a few months he will be surprised to find how much they have absorbed from the democracy and voluntarism of the American atmosphere, and consequently how much they have in common with all the

churches which are superficially called dissenting. There are many churches but one religion.

I reject as untenable the theory that our many churches are profitable because of any considerable diversity of spiritual gifts, and will note : —

5. The considerations which are usually influential in settling a man's church connections.

Few men have asked, and fewer still have truly answered, the question, *Why am I a member of this Church?* Comparatively few church-members can give a statement of the few points at which they differ from churches of other names. If, then, they cannot tell what are the peculiarities of their own church, it is self-evident that they have not chosen the church on account of those peculiarities.

(a) More than half of our people are where they are by inheritance. They love the faith of their parents and cling to the church of their childhood. *I was born and bred a methodist, sir!* Very good. It is much to your credit to live and die a methodist if you are a growing methodist. For, as we have seen,* the methodist is a grand man-reforming and soul-reviving church; and to honor one's father and mother, and hold fast the faith and forms received from them, is beyond question a graceful and an ennobling trait.

* See Lecture IV.

Furthermore, in case of all backsliders and wanderers from the ways of piety, they will ordinarily find that for the renewal of spiritual life they must begin where they left off. They must go back through the same gap by which they broke out. They must feed again in the pastures of their childhood. No man should be ashamed to give this as the reason of his church preference. That which I received of my parents I shall prize so long as I live, and shall hand down to my children unimpaired.

(*b*) Next we have the class who hold fast to the church in which they experienced religion. If there is a revival in the baptist church, by a law of innocent gregariousness the larger part of the converts will be buried with Christ in baptism. Just such persons, if converted by the same Spirit in the methodist church, will naturally and innocently be distributed into classes, and be content with having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and their bodies washed with pure water according to necessities oft recurring.

This law of loving adherence to the church with which we experienced religious quickening extends even beyond persons and doctrines, and lays hold upon meeting-houses and architectural monstrosities. In the far West, when christians meet and plan together to build a meeting-house, it will be found that

some are asking for a room of this or that pattern, and when they cannot all be gratified, the thoughtful among them will begin to see that each has been asking for a rebuilding of the place where he first gave his heart to God. Indeed, there is no other way of making meeting-houses memorable in beauty except this of meeting God therein.

(c) Others still are led into the church where they found a husband or a wife.

For as all sins are of kin, and visit men in company to curse them, so all the nobler passions of the soul are of heavenly race, and visit the pious and prayerful as the angels whom Jacob saw ascending and descending to bless the earth with gifts from heaven. They who purely and truly love, and ask of God a blessing upon their marriage vow, are quickened throughout their entire nature, and, as never before, are facile to religious influence and noble in their aspirations.

By a law of natural arrangement the two will go together into the church where either one is decisively at home. Statute law says, Let the wife follow the husband, for he is the head. Spiritual law says, Let these two go together to find a home ; and so there are blessed thousands who are in the church of their choice because they married into it.

It is both wise and honorable to love a church for either one of these considerations.: Because it is the church of our childhood ; because it is the church where we found the Lord ; or the church into which we entered at our marriage.

There are many other considerations of less dignity, but still quite innocent, which it is no disgrace to a man to obey, and admit that he has obeyed them. For instance :—

(*d*) A man would better join a church where he is not irritated or offended by uncongenial habits, dress, or manners, than one where he is so offended. All churches in a city have a certain social status. A man does well not to run a tilt against the inexorable stratifyings of society which, when pervaded by love, are the heavenly orders and degrees of the kingdom ; but when they are the rankings of self-love are no less inexorable, even though they be the ranks of hateful and envious men striving for masteries.

If any person feels ill at ease, annoyed, irritated, crossed, by social influences in the church of his choice, he does well to move out, and go to some other church where he can be at rest, just as sick folks leave New York and go to Florida. They mean no scorn of New York, they do not boast of Florida. They want to quit coughing. There is no question of

principle involved in a change of one's church connection. Churches, like the sabbath, were made for man, not man for churches. The old style congregationist of New England naturally becomes a presbyterian in Philadelphia. A man belonging to a genteel church in Boston, when he emigrates, will naturally join a genteel church in St. Louis, rather than a church of the same denominational name.

While all this is so, it should be the endeavor of every christian, in whatever church he is, to do his best to enlarge the genius and hospitality of that church, and make it a pleasant home for people of other ranks and grades and tastes beside his own. He will endeavor to become more and more comprehensive himself, — able to enjoy more and more sorts of people, and by his example lead others to this Christ-like faculty. Our Lord was at home with all classes. But while growing towards this stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus it is not wrong, but, on the other hand, altogether wise and proper, for people to obey their social instincts in the choice of their church. Let churches be gathered and compacted by elective affinities, and let no man be ashamed of it.

(e) Neither should men be ashamed to acknowledge that they go to this or that church for honest secular or pecuniary considerations.

It is no disgrace to a young doctor to look around and, finding that all churches save one have four doctors each, to say, *I'll join the church where there are no doctors. It will benefit my practice.*

Among the early methodists it was a part of their church covenant to help each other in business, — buy and sell one to another rather than to outsiders. In this respect they put in practice the precepts of Paul the apostle : Let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Therefore it is not a discredit to a man, providing he has sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, to select, from among seven good churches, that one for his home in which he can make the most money. But mark ! It is a sin, if a man has been determined in his choice by these secular considerations, to then stand up in or out of the church as a church champion, ready to enter into league offensive and defensive, and fight the battles of the sect, when in fact he cared nothing for the sect, but looked only to his own profit in making his home with them. This is my proposition : If a man loves all the churches, then it is proper for him to live with that church in which he can earn the most by doing the most.

(f) A church may be gathered and held together by personal regard for the pastor. This, though a

slender, is yet a perfectly innocent and sometimes a profitable and permanent tie. A christian will be on his guard lest he be mistaking pleasing excitement for the real food of sound doctrine. But when he is thus careful, and is certain in his own soul that he is fed with milk and strong meat both by this or that preacher, it becomes at once his duty to go and join the church where he can be fed ; in so doing he stands approved in his own conscience and before God. This style of church is more frequent in these days now passing than at any former time, and it is often blasphemed ungenerously. But as in our great cities there are families that have learned to keep house and to perfect a home who nevertheless send out to the city kitchen to obtain their food from absolute strangers, so it is quite possible for a man to perfect his family as a little church or to be gathered with others into a congenial "set" or society, and yet go away from them every Sunday, and every lecture-day, to get the religious food which he finds most nutritious for himself and for his. There are a great many who make our conspicuous churches populous, who have not really chosen a church, but only chosen a preacher.

I cannot stay to specify any more of the considerations usually undeclared, which control men in the choice of their church. I am safe in saying that not

two men in a hundred are related to the church of their choice because of any clear, intelligent, or rational estimate of her claims as being exclusively the church of God. Of the millions who make the Roman catholic church so blessedly populous, not one in a thousand can defend the church of his choice by any intelligent marshalling of her claims. It is the church of his fathers. It is holy mother church. In a less degree, the same is true of members of all our churches.

Since, then, in their practical administration, all churches are so much alike, and since so very few of the members of any church are able to explain or justify the church in which they have their home, it follows that any discussion or strife between churches, any comparison of their claims, any boastfulness or rivalry between them, are unwise, unreasonable, and to be abjured. It is a blessed thing to be gathered into any church. It is a cursed thing, having been gathered in, to blaspheme the dwelling-place of other saints. A church however good, however founded by the law and upon the word of God, if it be indwelt by a spirit contentious and uncharitable, ceases to be a church of Christ, as the Tuileries ceased to be a royal residence when the *sans culotte* went raging through the halls and pictured galleries, foaming with blasphemy and athirst for blood.

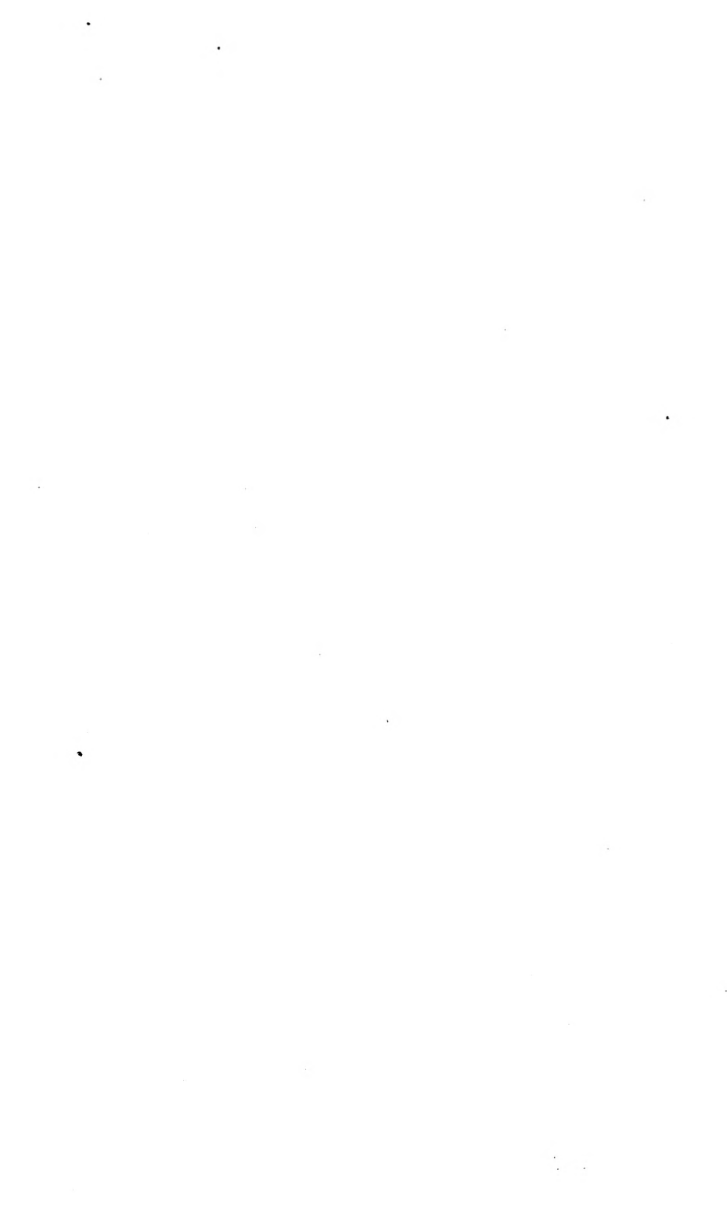
In choosing a church, therefore, far more depends upon the temper with which we go forth to seek, than upon the church in which at last we come to rest.

A man who would find a church that shall profit him should, first of all, emancipate himself from slavery to names. In this age and in this land, names of churches have ceased to describe them with any accuracy. Then, hungering and thirsting after righteousness and christian grace, let the seeker visit every church within his reach, preparing himself by prayer and by self-abasement; rendering to each at every visit his full contribution of money, sympathy, and prayer, let him sit and share in the services not as a critic, still less as a censor.

When thus he has tried all churches within his reach, then let him come back to any one that may seem best for him, and ask for the lowest place among its members. As he enters in and is enrolled let him say to every one that asks:—*I cannot tell whether this be the best church in the world, still less whether it be the true church. Of one thing only I am certain, that it is the best church for me. In it I am as nearly contented as a partly sanctified man can be this side the general assembly and church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.*

VIII.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.



LECTURE VIII.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

“I SPEAK CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.” —
Ephesians v. 32.

WE find among men bodies of christian believers who claim to be this CHURCH OF CHRIST, and to derive peculiar and exclusive grace from him the head. If, then, there be five or fifty of these separate bodies, and each body claims to be the one true and only CHURCH OF CHRIST, the conflict of these claims shows that a majority of the men who claim to have found the CHURCH OF CHRIST on earth are mistaken.

In contrast with this confusion, notice the precision and unity with which Jews can point out from their Scriptures the origin of their church, which was, no doubt, the visible church of God. A mere boy can find in the Old Testament the call of Abraham ; the covenant with his seed ; the deliverance of the people from slavery in Egypt ; their equipment as a church and nation under Aaron and Moses. Every reader sees

at a glance that the service of the sanctuary belongs to the tribe of Levi ; the priesthood is in the line of Aaron ; and so on to the uttermost detail of sacrifice and ceremony.

How different the result when we go with christian believers to inquire of the New Testament which one of many corporations is the CHURCH OF CHRIST ! A man who asks this question is in danger of being buried alive by the storm of replies that come whirling in on him from every quarter of contradiction.

In other words, when God undertook to found a visible Jewish church, he as usual succeeded, and made himself understood. I therefore conclude that since he has not made himself well understood in the matter of a visible christian church, he has not intended to found one upon earth.

Jesus seems to have taught this as he sat by the well of Samaria and said : — The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what : we know what we worship : for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Here we have the contrast between the visible church of Israel and the invisible CHURCH OF CHRIST. Israel a gathered and visible corporation with "ordinances of divine service," "an earthly sanctuary," a tabernacle and its furniture, ordained priests and their duty, a high-priest and his sole function ; by which splendid apparatus the Holy Ghost prophesied concerning the holiest of all, into which the way was not manifest while the tabernacle and temple were yet standing.

In contrast with this, the CHURCH OF CHRIST is a corporation not yet gathered ; without ordinances, without an earthly sanctuary, without a tabernacle, without ordained priests, without a high-priest on earth. It is the whole company of them who, being quickened by the Holy Ghost, do ever worship God in spirit and in truth. And as pilgrims of old came from all lands to worship in Jerusalem, a city beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth ; so these spiritual worshipers from every land are journeying as pilgrims to the New Jerusalem, to the temple whose glory shall never pass away.

The first questions that bred strife in the apostolic churches handled this very matter of form *versus* spirit. Well-meaning, conscientious, pious Jews, having received in full volume the benefit of an estab-

lished church, followed in the footsteps of the apostle Paul, and were full of anxiety because of the new and disorderly little societies, that had no rules and by-laws, nor any guidance except the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Here is the exact spot at which the christian church takes its departure from the Jewish church not only, but from all other visible churches as well. In Christ Jesus neither ceremony nor lack of ceremony profits, but a new creature.

It must needs be, however, that christian men will be drawn together by their affinities ; and as they dwell together will take on habits ; and all these habits of associated christians are good if caused by a christian spirit, and if they increase the same ; and all these habits are bad if they be a mere legacy of ancestral usage, neither proceeding from nor quickening the spirit of the children.

All churches of Christ, so called by men, have in their membership more or less christians ; and these christians in every church are members elect of CHRIST'S CHURCH. By their graces and goodness the churches to which they belong are beautified and made of good repute. These true christians are found in their churches as gold is found in its veins. Men naturally look in quartz veins to find gold and in churches to find christians. They are found there in greater

abundance than elsewhere. But still there is more quartz than gold in our gold veins, and it may be that many are called and few are chosen in our churches. Gold is found, too, in river-beds, apart from any vein, like those rare but royal christians, who, without church help, are mingling with men, all uncorroded, clean, and shining, like gold grains in the sand.

Jesus has taught us that the kingdom of heaven is as a net cast into the sea, bringing all manner of fish unto the shore. Great churches seem to me great nets, small churches small nets ; and until these gospel fisheries are over and ended, and their proceeds assorted, it will not be known which one of our many denominations called *christian* comes nearest to deserving the title.

And here we may see how unfortunate it is for any denomination or church to claim to be exclusively THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. Not injurious to others but unfortunate for herself. Of course any church or denomination may call itself the church of Christ, — “THE” instead of “A” church of Christ. But in one of two ways this mistake will work a great sorrow. For a man must either :—(a) Stultify himself by saying in one breath, — *Mine is the true church, but still I am not a bigot and other churches are just as good*, which is sheer stupidity, or else :—(b) He must

firmly and consistently declare the perdition of all men who do not belong to his chosen church. What can be more self-satisfied, not to say conceited and arrogant,* than to count up the members of one's own denomination, a little company at largest, little as compared with the whole race of man, and say of this mere handful, — *These and these only God loves. For all the other millions he hath prepared the furnace and the fire!*

To avoid this collision between one's reason and one's religion, it is only necessary to accept the New Testament doctrine as to the CHURCH OF CHRIST and the kingdom of God. That there is not upon earth a visible, corporate CHURCH OF CHRIST with headquarters in Jerusalem or Samaria, Rome or Moscow, Peking or Salt Lake City. There are, thank God, millions of unmistakable christians in the world, but not one church that can claim for herself as a corporation any pre-eminence or special title to the name *christian*. The primary import of the word "church" is *assembly, company, congregation*. And as deserts take their color from the color of each grain of sand, so churches take their quality and derive their right to the name christian from the quality of the members. An assembly of christians is a christian church, no matter

* But still consistent, see pp. 9, 10, *supra*.

how organized. An assembly of robbers is a thieving church. An assembly of firemen is a fireman's church.

And any assembly, for whatever purpose organized, the moment its members receive the Spirit and graces of Christ, becomes by that blessed receiving a christian church. And on the other hand there is no church known among men, however apostolic in origin and venerable by reason of age, but becomes at once anti-christian and evil the moment that its members cease to be temples of the Holy Ghost.

We thus conclude that there are many churches or assemblies of christians upon earth and among men, but no one great universal CHURCH OF CHRIST. And yet :—

2. *Man needs a universal or catholic church.*

Men taken one by one are insignificant. Men when united are capable of greatness and achievement quite inconceivable. The history of human progress is therefore a history of successful association. On the other hand, the history of human disaster is a history of collisions, by which associations or nations have been broken up in mid-voyage, and, foundering, have gone under.

You will notice, too, that the men in history who seem to have been leaders, heroes, or demigods are great rather by their position than in themselves. They are

the tips of great pyramids, — the most conspicuous stone of the heap because lifted up by all the other stones that underlie them in useful obscurity. Or, changing the figure, as the South-sea surf-rider keeps his little float underneath him and neither behind nor ahead of the rushing wave, and so doing seems to be master of the wave, of which he is in fact a most obsequious servant ; so of prelates in the church, and generals in armies, and potentates on thrones, and presidents in republics, they owe what they have of reputed greatness to their ability to top the wave of people who are moving obedient to what is called the tendency of the times.

Forces among men are social forces, not individual forces. Compulsions are social compulsions, not individual. Achievements are social, not individual. As was said in the beginning by the Lord himself : — This people is one. They have all one language. Nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.

Because man gains so much by working with his fellow-man, and loses so much by quarrelings and divisions, the dream of philanthropists in all ages has been to perfect society and make it endure. Such men feel and say that the welfare of one man and the welfare of all men should not conflict ; that the need

of the race is rightly organized society ; that social wrong is the fecund parent of personal sin ; and that society as a whole, as it has been the cause, should become the cure, of the woes that afflict men.

Some with one theory and some with another, some in one land and some in another, are ever working to solve the same problem, — to build society so justly that the building shall not fall. They believe in man. They “have high hopes for humanity.”

These philosophers and philanthropists fail so uniformly that many men are ashamed to acknowledge that they are interested in any such social questions. Many men are ashamed to be called socialists. And yet Jesus Christ was the most radical socialist that ever lived. *That they all may be one*, is the end and aim of his entire undertaking. He differs from the Babel-builders called socialists among men in just this :— He undertakes at the outset to renew the character and temper of each member of his proposed society. Or, using the apostle’s metaphor, he shapes one by one the “living stones” of his temple, and when all are at last prepared he proposes to lay them up according to a divine pattern.

Other socialists set the blind to lead the blind ; balance one wrong by another wrong ; and try to compact in one society men whose only agreement is their

discontent. Jesus Christ, in contrast, begins with one general condemnation of all men. He declares that the first step toward the kingdom of heaven — that is, eternal society — must be a renewed heart in each member; and he gives himself to this work by a magnificent sacrifice of himself. He lays aside his glory and God-hood to offer himself at once a ransom and an inspiration for a mighty multitude of men, — men who at his call deny themselves and, bearing a cross daily, walk in the footsteps of God manifest.

By and by these renewed, transformed, regenerated sons of men shall come for the first time to such quality and stature that they can be put together and kept together in one body, without fault, or flaw, or fear of schism. A glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

Because man cannot renew his own heart nor the heart of his neighbor, therefore man cannot gather nor govern a church universal. Because God can renew the hearts of men, purging away the last trace of selfishness and taint of sin, therefore God can gather and govern a church universal. And, blessed be his name, God will gather such a church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Upon her glory shall come no dimness and to her greatness no reduction.

3. *God will yet gather and perfect this GRAND SOCIETY of which all the prophets have spoken since the world began.*

It is for this special work that Jesus has been set apart, — the Christ of God, to rule over things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth.

Be it remembered that this CHURCH OF CHRIST is a company or society, chosen and gathered by him according to his own sovereign choice. We may or may not understand the reasons that influence him in his choice. Who hath known the mind of God?

Be it remembered, too, that men are taught all things concerning Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Remember also that this divine Teacher proceeding from the Father and Son has not put himself, that we know of, under guardianship of any man or church of men. He has no business agent to make appointments for him. He inspires whom he will. Ye hear the sound of him, but ye cannot tell whence he cometh nor whither he goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit. In other words, each member of the CHURCH OF CHRIST, being effectually called and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, is thus a distinct and separate work of God. No church of men can at all better his credentials, and no church can separate him from the love of God that is in and through Jesus Christ the Lord.

I note with repetitious emphasis that God has intrusted all choice and judgment to his son Jesus Christ, and all *effective* instruction to the Holy Ghost. Therefore let no man pretend to say how many or how few are to be gathered into this CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Beyond all question, the ever-blessed Trinity is working with power in the lines and with the apparatus of "evangelic churches," as we call them. But is there no residue of the Spirit? Must we refuse to hope that, in ways and by instruments beyond all that we can even think, God is working, in every land, among them who fear him and are working righteousness?

My brethren, I come to you with a very high argument, an argument that moderates alike the presumption and the despair of men.

To you that are cast down because preaching seems powerless, revivals rare, and churches thinly peopled, I come saying, God is able of these stones to raise up members for his intended CHURCH. The word of God goes sounding round the globe, a daily tide proceeding forth from him as sunlight from the sun, and nothing is hid from the power of it. The work of God the Holy Ghost is and always was beyond all that we can understand or measure. And

so this great work of gathering up and perfecting a mighty CHURCH, bright as the sun and fair as the moon, is from beginning to end, from first to last, God's work. Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God. All things are working together for good unto them who love God, unto them who are called according to his promise.

On the other hand ecclesiastical pride and presumption are humbled by this doctrine. The works of man when contrasted with nature and tested by her forces shrink up and are as nothing. How atom-like the hugest ship that ever floated, when the storm is abroad, and the dark places of the great deep are revealed! How like chaff the works of men are scattered and driven by the tornado! How worthless a great city swept by an enraged river or shaken by a ten-seconds earthquake! People who dwell along the earthquake belts make no large attainment in economic art. Their houses are one story, cheap, elastic. They live in the shadow of danger, the fear of death. Face to face with nature in her destructive mood, they never forget their own feebleness. They cannot. Their fear breeds thoughtfulness, or at least superstition.

Now these forces of nature are but feeble types of God's greatness and energy, — his power to destroy.

Heaven is his throne, earth his footstool. He speaks and the mountains melt, or timid flee and are lost in the deep. He makes the winds his messengers. He sends forth the lightnings as angels — they gleam as they go. There is none like unto our God. To know him is to fear him. O come, let us worship and bow down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

Of God thus revealed I am saying, that of his own will he has chosen to gather a mighty multitude whose beginnings were in the flesh ; — to gather and perfect them one by one, and all in one, till they shall become, by his power working in them, one BODY so penetrated and possessed by his Spirit that it shall be accepted into the Godhead ; and, through espousal with the Son, be one with Him, and with the Father, and with the Holy Ghost. Having this purpose, conceived in wisdom, quickened by love, made possible by unbounded power, God himself warrants its consummation. No man can add to the number of the elect. No archangel, glorified or damned, can take away one atom from this eternal crystal. It is the CHURCH OF CHRIST which he hath redeemed to himself out of all lands and every nation, and through all ages.

Now, brethren, I protest that no man can really

believe in this HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH, and ever again be much uplifted in contemplation of that little church of his choice here among men, be the same what we call large like Rome, or small like the last quaker first-day-meeting. No man can have been caught up by the Holy Ghost until he truly and thrillingly believes in the HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH, and ever afterward find much to boast of, and far less to fear, in connection with those pleasant little companies of men in uniform, who call themselves the CHURCH OF CHRIST on earth. This high argument as to the HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH is thus, as we said, strength to the feeble-minded, joy to the poor in spirit, comfort to the mourning ; and, on the other hand, it brings chastening to the pomp and pride of prelacy, and gives meaning to the apostle's word :—Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. It is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.

4. *Who are members of this CHURCH OF CHRIST?*

If an artillery officer were to order a private in his command to pile a thousand cannon-balls in a solid pile, without any spaces between them, the private, however humble, would be able at once to see and to say, *It can't be done, sir!*

But if, in contrast, a master mason should take a

workman out upon a lot and show him a thousand hewn stone, no two alike, and not one complete in itself, and should say, *These are to be laid up into a house*, the workman could at once see and feel that the thing is not only possible, but probable.

In like manner, of certain classes of men, the humblest intelligence can perceive that being round and hard and self-centred, complete in their own pleasures, they cannot, by any possibility, be wrought into a social body. On the other hand, there are qualities of mind and character, in a word "*gifts*," so desirable and yet so various, distributed among men, that it is plain at a glance, that, whether we can organize them or not, they were made to be organized. In short, of certain men it can be clearly seen that they are not, and cannot be, of the CHURCH OF CHRIST; while of others it can be seen clearly that they are fitted for special places in some society — a church of some sort, whether of Christ or not is a further question.

Suppose, next, that our master mason is himself led forth by an architect, who carries with him drawings of a proposed building; and they two go a-field among the hewn stones, to see whether they can pick out from among these curiously shaped fragments suitable pieces to build the house which the architect has planned. As the plans are unrolled and the

mason looks them over, he says naturally, *Good sir, it will cost less to hew new stones, and shape them so as to agree with your plans, than it will to pick out and fix over these that are already shaped for other plans. Here are unhewn blocks ready to take any shape.*

By these illustrations I set forth that there are three classes of men. (a) Self-centred men, who can touch but never be united with others. (b) The shaped and fitted for societies and partnerships that have already existed, being filled with love of church or love of country, or pride of race or family. And (c) Men who have refused to be conformed to the requirements of this world's prosperity, and who by every act declare that they wish to be shaped, so as to become fitted members of a society yet to be gathered.

The CHURCH OF CHRIST, when gathered and perfected, will be found to consist largely of men from this last class, — men who have no love for themselves and who have not been conformed to the principles or societies of this present world.

Whether any of the first two classes will have place in the CHURCH OF CHRIST is more than we can foresee. Paul indicates that there are likely to be wise master-builders who upon the foundation Jesus Christ

will build gold, silver, and precious stones. There are to be little societies, blessed christian families, humble, simple christian churches, that so dwell together in faith and hope and love, that the members are really shaped according to a heavenly pattern already. The kingdom of heaven is come and the will of God is done in earth as in heaven. Just where or how many of these blessed societies are to be found among men we cannot say. Happy are they who, before their translation, have a foretaste of the heavenly unity, and who know for certain that having dwelt in love upon earth, they are about to dwell in God forever.

But beside these who receive a heavenly shaping are great multitudes in and around our churches who are shaped by anti-Christ. Upon them usages and tricks of will-worship are stamped by a weight of superstition and conformity. Devotees are squeezed out of shape, into a shapely unity, like figs in their drum or raisins in a box. The package is shapely, but the fruits that are packed have lost all beauty. To what extent these devotees can be unpacked and restored to their original grace is more than I can say.

There are great multitudes who are fairly represented by unhewn stone waiting the fashioning hand of the skilful workman. Great numbers of men in and

around our churches, upon whose spirit has been impressed the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. They have been so possessed by this one salutary truth that they have ceased from man ; have ceased from their own ways and works ; have passed all their days in patience, and in innocence, and in waiting for somewhat that they could not describe. Not seeing, they yet believe. These are the poor in spirit of whom Jesus said—Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. These are the publicans who at the church doors smite their breasts and dare not lift up so much as their eyes unto heaven, of whom Jesus said — They are justified. These are the little ones of whom it was said — It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. These are the last who shall be first. These are they of whom this world is not worthy. And they are a mighty multitude whom no man can number. They cannot always bear examination as to the great doctrines of the law or of the gospel. They cannot say yea or nay to the pretensions of an overbearing church of which they may or may not be members, whether pagan, Mohammedan, Buddhist, Roman, or presbyterian. To them the earth beneath is God's earth, the sky above is God's sky, the stars are eyes of angels, the sun's uprising is God's outshine, the flowers are his fancy-work, the mountains his masonry. The heavens declare his

glory, the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge.

Of this great class, then, in all ages and among all races, I would say, they are the unshaped, unhewn stones of Christ's temple. They are the uneducated members of CHRIST'S CHURCH. They are neither sphered, self-centred, nor selfish. They are not shaped and fitted to base or narrow uses and the special needs of men ; nor yet have they taken the graceful forms which belong to the saints. They are the "other sheep" of whom Christ spoke. They may not yet be gathered into this or that fold. They are the ones of whom Jesus said — Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. They are the sons whom God has foreknown and has predestinated *to be conformed* to the image of his Son.

As a householder making a feast invites whom he will and no wrong is done to them who are not invited, — may he not do what he will with his own? — as a crown prince may make a progress through all lands to find the woman of his choice, and, espousing her, wrongs none of them whom he does not choose : — so many are called and but few chosen. The hospitality of God is sovereign. The BRIDE, the Lamb's wife, is

not forced upon him for reasons of state nor by operation of laws, agreements, or stipulations. He hath loved her. He hath given himself for her. He hath died to redeem her, and she maketh herself ready. To her it is granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints ; and blessed are all they which are called as guests merely to the supper — the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

When at last Christ and his CHURCH are thus united and in perfect and enduring accord, then shall come to pass the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all and to convince the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds.

The saints shall judge the world. For the Lord Jesus Christ shall come with all his saints. They shall live. They cannot die any more. Over them the second death hath no power. They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years ; and when the thousand years are ended of this glorious reign of Christ and his CHURCH there shall be a conflict, short, sharp, decisive. Satan, long ago cast out of heaven to be ever since the prince of this world, with his angels on the one side ; and Jesus Christ the son of God and his compacted CHURCH on the other side. And unto principalities and powers

in heavenly places shall be known by the CHURCH the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Satan with his angels shall be overthrown. The great multitude of them that are carried captive by him, shall be rescued and redeemed ; and when Christ and his CHURCH have done their work, then for the first time it will be fully known who are the saved and who the lost.

Brethren and citizens all! A place and a part in this glorious CHURCH OF CHRIST is not for me to promise. It is for God to give. It is for us to be willing to receive, to wait for, and wish for, and humbly ask for, a place in that CHURCH. Even me. And it may be the Spirit will certify you that you are chosen. If so, rejoice with trembling.

But if we may not be members of that mystic body, the CHURCH OF CHRIST, let us ask for at least a place among the guests at the marriage-supper ! If we may not be among the saints that reign, let us pray to be found among the subjects of that blessed kingdom. If we be not chosen priests, let us ask to be worshipers. If we sit not among the saints to judge the world, let us humbly ask to stand among the

ransomed who are by them declared justified and saved.

Saved IN the CHURCH OF CHRIST or saved BY the CHURCH — God grant that we all may find ourselves, at the day of consummation.

DOXOLOGY.

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, . . . unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.”

AMEN.



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THE BIBLE